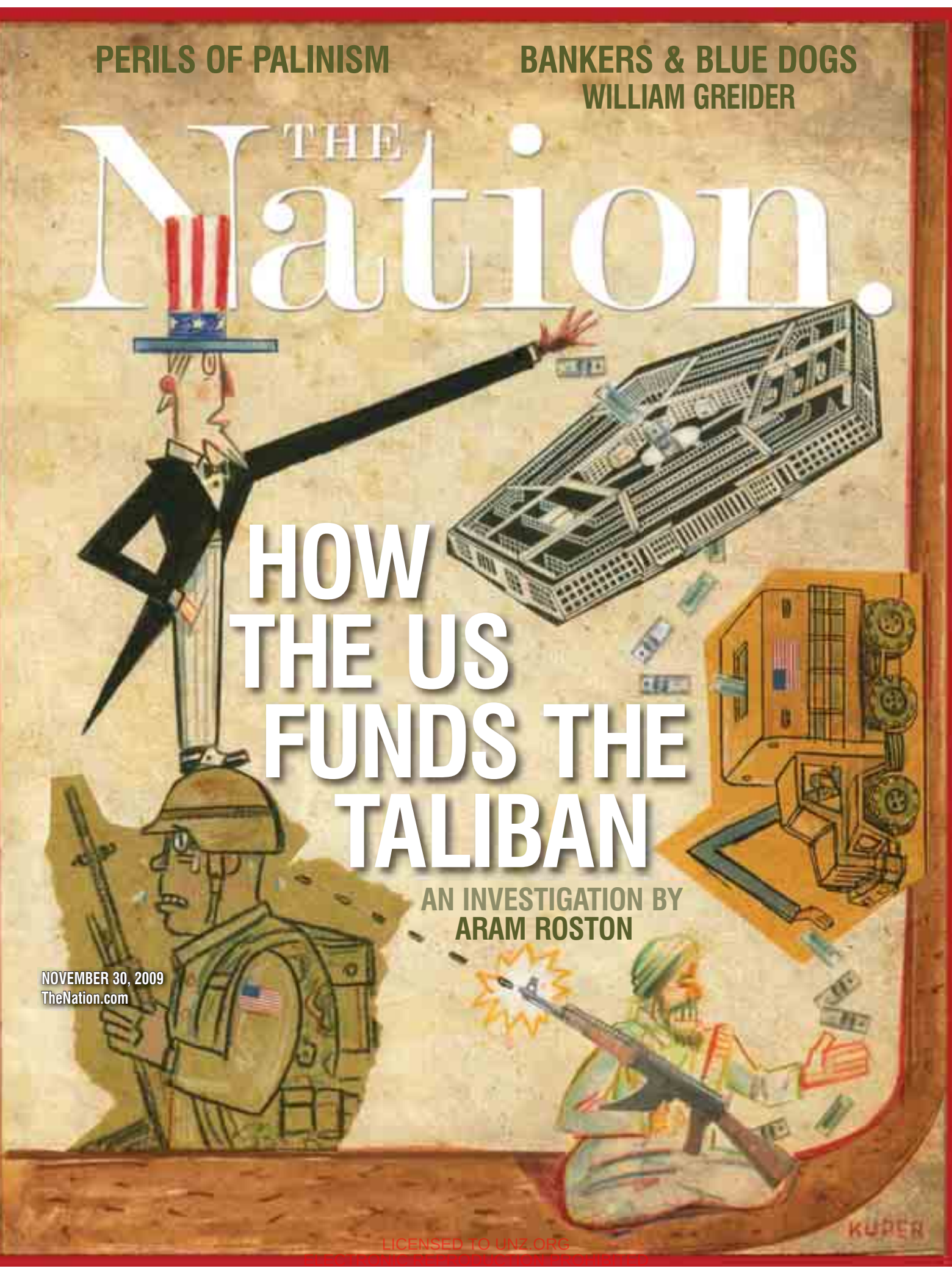
PERILS OF PALINISM

BANKERS & BLUE DOGS
WILLIAM GREIDER

THE Nation.



HOW THE US FUNDS THE TALIBAN

AN INVESTIGATION BY
ARAM ROSTON

NOVEMBER 30, 2009
TheNation.com

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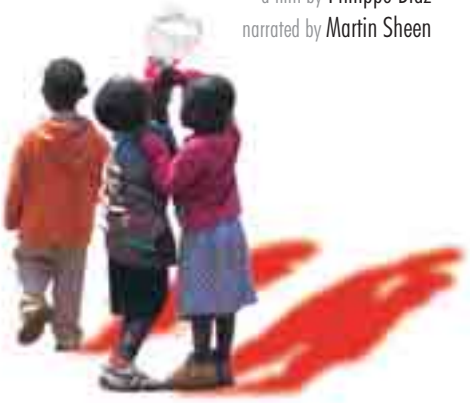

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Letters

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

GRANTSVILLE, MD.
Thanks for Christopher Hayes's "Tuesdays With Rahm" [Oct. 26]. It was insightful, even though Hayes had to keep his sources anonymous. I worked in four states for the Obama campaign. As rugged as that was down in the trenches under the grassroots, it was much simpler than trying to deal with the entrenched conservadems/Blue Dogs in our community Democratic Party organizations. Now that we progressives have segued to become OFA (Organizing for America) community organizers, it's eye-opening to see how far to the right the Democratic Party is. The conservadems are so delusional as to believe that it was their efforts that got Obama into the White House. These people are so obstructionist, we should write them off as DINOs (Democrats in Name Only) and hand them over to the Republicans no matter what Rahm Emanuel says. Be it known that OFA and the progressive groups are now a well-honed organizing machine, and our voices *will* be heard.
ANDREW J. DI LIDDO JR.

Appalachian Fall

BRANDON, FLA.
I was glad to hear a little positive news about the coalfields of Appalachia [Jeff Biggers, "The Coalfield Uprising," Oct. 19]. I spent a year in eastern Kentucky and saw firsthand the devastation of mountaintop removal. It seems the people of Appalachia are seen as a commodity to be used to dig out the coal and then removed when they get in the way. Most of these families go back nearly two centuries, and many have their ancestors buried on their land. One man showed us that the sludge that was pushed down the mountains had unearthed the coffins of family members buried on his hillside. These "hillbillies" are some of the most beautiful people, living in a beautiful part of the country that is being destroyed by greedy coal companies.
LUCY FUCHS

letters@thenation.com

NASHVILLE
I have recently done a project for a class on the subject of mountaintop removal, and through my research I have discovered much of the ugly truth about it. I am really excited that people are finally starting to publish the truths and are bringing people into the light about the destruction of our beloved mountains. We can only hope that others will read this article and help all of us to take back our mountains, and our well-being. Thank you so much.
REBECCA HOFEMISTER

Turning on a Dine

LOS ANGELES
Helena Cobban's profile of Tom Dine, "Confessions of an AIPAC Veteran" [Nov. 2], should've been titled "Encomium for an Unrepentant Careerist Pol." It's sour grapes, I guess, but, probably like other Americans without steady jobs or healthcare, I found it hard to relate to a guy who takes a big gig at one of the most notorious lobbying outfits, gets ratted out and skips to a series of cushy jobs. An epiphany follows; after eight years of dealing with "these people," Dine "could look with fresh…eyes and sensitivities at the Palestinians…and ask what was this hate all about?" Learn while you earn. WTF?
GENE SCULATTI

DURHAM, N.C.
I'm glad that Helena Cobban has recovered from the sleepless nights caused by Tom Dine in the 1980s when she was trying to argue the outrageous concept that Palestinians are human beings. Dine and his ilk caused me and officials such as Senator Paul Findley and President Carter far more than sleepless nights. After I published an article in *Newsweek* (September 15, 1980), my career was broken and my life was changed forever. Like Cobban, I posited that it might be "good for the Jews" to "open conversations with our

(continued on page 24)

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Healthcare History

The official sponsor of the House healthcare reform bill was Michigan Congressman John Dingell. Historians of the epic struggle to provide basic medical care to all Americans will recognize that Dingell, the longest-serving member of the House, is the son of the Congressman who proposed legislation to establish a national medical care and hospitalization fund during FDR's third term. That pioneering proposal did not pass in the 1943 Congressional session, nor did ensuing versions proposed by Dingell Sr. and then his son over the next sixty-six years.

EDITORIAL

This historical context is vital because it reminds those who have advocated for healthcare reform for the better part of a century that something remarkable happened on November 7 when the House voted 220-215 for legislation that the Congressional Budget Office says will extend insurance coverage to 36 million uncovered Americans. Wisconsin Representative Tammy Baldwin, a key Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which drafted much of the legislation, captured the excitement of veteran reformers when she said, "I truly believe that we'll look back years from now and view the passage of this act to be as significant as the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935 and the Medicare and Medicaid Act in 1965." Baldwin's enthusiasm is appealing, but it will take more than enthusiasm to make the bill into a program equal in character and value to Social Security and Medicare.

Unlike the Medicare-for-all plan championed by this magazine, the House bill does not provide universal coverage. It does too little to control rapidly inflating insurance costs and does almost nothing to rein in the price of prescription drugs. By mandating that the uninsured purchase coverage, it provides a boon to insurance companies. The subsidies it gives to low-income families are not as robust as they should be, and the public option it offers as an alternative to private insurers lacks the necessary muscle to compete and bars undocumented immigrants from participating. Perhaps most offensive, the bill includes an amendment, written by Michigan Congressman Bart Stupak, that bans access to reproductive health services in public and private insurance plans funded under the act—a last-minute compromise designed to win the votes of antichoice Democrats (see Katha Pollitt's column on page 9).

These are serious flaws. But the legislation is also a historic advance in the long battle to create a more rational and humane healthcare system. In addition to expanding coverage to two-thirds of those uninsured, it prohibits companies from denying coverage to those with "pre-existing conditions," bans them from dropping people when they get sick and forces insurers to cover a range of essential benefits and services. These are undeniably progressive measures, and over time they can be improved upon.

We respect those advocates of single-payer like Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who voted against the plan, and California Nurses Association executive director Rose Ann DeMoro, who has called the bill a "massive bailout for the private insurance industry." But the reality is that there may never be a better moment to get the United States on the right track. And so, as the bill moves to the more treacherous terrain of the Senate, we believe that the task of progressives is to fight to preserve the House bill's best elements while ridding it of as many defects as possible and laying the groundwork for an expansion of its programs.

In that regard Senate Democrats, led

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This week at TheNation.com

News & Analysis

Mike Konczal: Fixing "too big to fail"

Barbara Ehrenreich: The swine flu vaccine screw-up

Matthew Wolfe: Detroit voters elect an openly gay City Council president

Blogs The Beat: The latest on healthcare reform

The Dreyfuss Report: The deal with Iran

Video What is the future of journalism?

SlideShow The obfuscators on the road to healthcare reform

by California's Barbara Boxer, may have the necessary votes to remove the Stupak amendment. It is vital that they do so and that the White House support their efforts. Other efforts, led by Vermont independent Bernie Sanders—to establish better protections for consumers and patients and to control insurance-industry profiteering—could improve the final bill. But the defenders of a for-profit healthcare system in the Senate, including not just all Republican members but also Joe Lieberman, are formidable obstacles. They intend to remove the public option, perhaps replacing it with an opt-out mechanism, state insurance coops and nonprofits, or a public-option trigger. These are all inferior plans and, for progressives interested in moving toward something like Medicare for all, paltry building blocks to work with. Proposals to prevent undocumented immigrants even from purchasing insurance with their own money are also on the table—and promise to become a public health nightmare should they go through. There is a very real danger that the final version of the reform bill will include sops to antichoice and anti-immigrant forces and yet still lack adequate limits on the insurance industry it generously subsidizes. But for the moment, in the House bill there is certainly something to work with, and something to fight for.

The Perils of Palinism

In one way of looking at it, Sarah Palin is the best thing that ever happened to the Democratic Party.

Electorally, she is the GOP gift that keeps on giving. First there was Campaign 2008, which flamed out with her car-crash Katie Couric interview just as spectacularly as it had begun, three weeks earlier, with her star turn at the Republican convention.

COMMENT

More recently, in the November 3 elections this year, she played a crucial role in delivering the Democrats one of their few victories. Palin and her culture-war comrades Rush Limbaugh, Dick Armey and Glenn Beck took up the cause of Conservative Party candidate Doug Hoffman in the 23rd District Congressional race in New York. As a result the moderate, prochoice Republican candidate, Dede Scozzafava, bowed out, endorsing Democrat Bill Owens. Hoffman was unable to convince the district's overwhelmingly white rural voters that banning abortions and gay marriage and bashing government held the answers to their concerns, and on election day the Democrat triumphed, capturing a district that had been in Republican hands since the nineteenth century.

With enemies like this, who needs friends? If only Palin had intervened more forcefully in gubernatorial races in New Jersey and Virginia—where, unbidden, she issued robocalls to get out the vote for Republican Bob McDonnell—Democrats might be celebrating an electoral trifecta.

It's tempting to cheer Sarah Barracuda on as she cannibalizes what remains of the Republican Party. The *Going Rogue* book tour, the 2010 targeting of moderates like Florida's Charlie Crist, a 2012 bid for the presidency—bring it on! While the percentage of Republican voters who say they would seriously consider vot-

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Noted.

TOBIN TAX ON THE TABLE: British Prime Minister **Gordon Brown** surprised just about everyone when he encouraged G-20 finance ministers to consider establishing a global financial transaction tax—sometimes referred to as a "Tobin Tax" out of respect for pioneering proposals advanced by Nobel Prize–winning economist **James Tobin**—as a means of reducing speculation in global markets and raising resources for social spending. Treasury Secretary **Timothy Geithner** immediately rejected the idea of taxing speculators, but Oxfam policy adviser **Max Lawson** said, "The fact you've got Gordon Brown coming out and saying this is a real turning point. It puts the issue on the political map."

Working to keep it on the map, despite what Geithner says, is Oregon Democratic Congressman **Peter DeFazio**, long an advocate for transaction taxes. DeFazio has found twenty-nine co-sponsors for legislation that would tax speculation in crude oil futures. He's also attracted thirteen co-sponsors for a more ambitious proposal to tax securities transactions to the extent required to recoup the net cost of the Troubled Asset Relief Program, which is delightfully titled the Let Wall Street Pay for Wall Street's Bailout Act of 2009. JOHN NICHOLS

IMPASSE IN PALESTINE: With his decision not to run for re-election in January as president of the Palestinian Authority, **Mahmoud Abbas** may be marking the end of an era. The PA, established fifteen years ago after the Oslo Accords, was conceived as a temporary authority, pending a negotiated solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. But ever since the failure of the 2000 Camp David summit and the eruption of the second intifada, the "peace process" has been on life support. Recent events seem to call for last rites.

The death blow may have been the Obama administration's acquiescence in **Benjamin Netanyahu**'s refusal to freeze settlement growth. Abbas and his colleagues could justifiably ask, If *this* administration—considered too Arab-friendly by many Israelis—won't stand up to Netanyahu on this issue, what's the point of continuing? What is there left to negotiate if Israel is allowed to keep swallowing Palestinian land?

This was only the latest insult—Abbas and his cohort had already lost most of the last shreds of credibility when they bowed to US and Israeli pressure to delay endorsement of the UN's **Goldstone Report** alleging Israeli and Hamas war crimes in the recent Gaza conflict. The PA's quick reversal, after a storm of protest, did nothing to regain favor with the Palestinian public. And the decision of the US Congress to condemn the Goldstone Report by a 344–36 margin (the scant opposition included **Dennis Kucinich**, **Jim McGovern**, **Keith Ellison**, **John Dingell**, **Ron Paul** and **Lynn Woolsey**) could not encourage anyone hoping for a change in US policy. All these humiliations were merely the capstone of sixteen years of vain hopes that Oslo-brokered negotiations would lead to independence and Palestinian statehood, rather than rapidly expanded Israeli colonization of the West Bank.

There's no question that the conflict is at a bleak impasse. But if the PA collapses, there will be one salutary consequence: it will strip off the mask that there is anything in the territories beyond Israeli occupation. Even at its height in the '90s, Palestinian autonomy was negligible. Now the undeniable fact of near total Israeli control, and the increasing difficulty of pretending that nearly half a century of occupation is temporary, will force some stark decisions on both peoples.

The Palestinians, quite apart from the desperate need to heal the Hamas-Fatah split and reforge a unified leadership, will have to develop a new liberation strategy. Israel, for its part, may seem to be holding all the cards at this point. But as the occupation becomes ever more deeply implanted, it will soon enough become undeniable that, for all practical purposes, there is only one nation between the Jordan and the sea, composed of roughly equal numbers of Palestinians and Jews. Then Israel will "face a South African–style struggle for equal voting rights," former Israeli Prime Minister **Ehud Olmert** warned when he was still in office, "and as soon as that happens, the state of Israel is finished." So Israel will have to confront its own existential dilemma: are the settlements really worth retaining if it means the eventual end of Zionism? ROANE CAREY

WHAT'S IN A NAME? The horrific November 5 shootings at the Fort Hood Army base in Texas unleashed some predictable Islamophobia, as pundits and politicians leapt from fretting about the alleged crimes of one Muslim to spreading fear about Muslims in general. Within hours of the shootings, when about all that was known was that the gunman had been identified as Army Maj. **Malik Nidal Hasan**, Fox News anchor **Shepard Smith** asked Texas Senator **Kay Bailey Hutchison** on air, "The name tells us a lot, does it not, Senator?" Hutchison responds, "It does. It does, Shepard."

The name told them nothing. Details that would eventually emerge about Hasan's alleged mental state, fear of being assigned to Afghanistan and extreme religious views provided insights about the man and the incident. But the notion that a name that sounds Arabic or Islamic explains an attack on soldiers is as absurd as the suggestion that a name that sounds Irish and Catholic, or German and Protestant, explains antiabortion violence. Actually, it's worse, because spreading suspicion about Islam in the military disregards the valiant service of thousands of Muslims whose presence in the US armed forces has been hailed by Army chief of staff Gen. **George Casey** as diversity that "gives us *all* strength."

The good news was that groups such as the **American Muslim Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Council** (AMAF-VAC) recognized the threat and stepped up to declare, "Islam holds the human soul in high esteem, and considers the attack against innocent human beings a grave sin." Perhaps the next time Shepard Smith wants to talk about what a name means, he'll invite AMAF-VAC executive director **Qaseem Ali Uqdah**. "This is a criminal act and we have to treat it like a criminal act, not something to do with religion," says Uqdah, a twenty-one-year veteran of the Marines who worries about the danger of name-checking in the military. "What we don't need is people downrange sitting in foxholes questioning if you are a Christian, if you are a Muslim or if you are a Jew.… That is not what we need as a nation." JOHN NICHOLS

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ing for Palin for president stands at 65 percent, among all voters the figure is mired at 33 percent. As former McCain campaign strategist Steve Schmidt—one of the key architects of the Palin veep pick—put it recently, "Were she to be the nominee [for president in 2012], we could have a catastrophic election result." Three more years of Palin poison infusing Republican politics will likely spell supermajorities for Democrats and a second term for Obama.

But what of the poison's other effects? Her nonsensical statements may inadvertently provide comic relief, but it's no laughing matter when serious debate is distorted by the wild misinformation she feeds to her increasingly paranoid base. Sometimes the lunacy is contained on the fringes. At a recent Wisconsin Right to Life fundraiser, she somberly raised the decision to move the "In God We Trust" motto to the edge of the presidential dollar coin. "Who calls a shot like that?" she said, insinuatingly. Actually, George W. Bush did. It was an embarrassing gaffe that also neatly captures the key elements of Palinism: fact-free conspiracy, hollow patriotism and public religiosity—the very coins of Republican populist rage.

But sometimes her interventions reach a wider audience. Consider the role Palin played in the "death panel" hysteria that hijacked the healthcare debate this summer. That myth did not originate with Palin; the source was Betsy McCaughey, the Clinton healthcare antagonist. But it was Palin who popularized the term "death panel" by posting a screed against healthcare reform on her Facebook page that included this classic Palinism: "The America I know and love is not one in which my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama's 'death panel' so his bureaucrats can decide, based on a subjective judgment of their 'level of productivity in society,' whether they are worthy of health care. Such a system is downright evil." With remarkable economy of prose, Palin cast healthcare reform as an assault on the country, put a face on its supposed victims (her baby, Trig), contrived the expression "death panel" (linking it directly to Obama), raised the specter of euthanasia in the service of a state-run economy and rallied the troops around a fight against "evil." We all know what happened next. After a summer of zany tea parties, more than 40 percent of Americans believed that healthcare reform would create death panels, and support for a public option (the campaign's real target) had sunk to 52 percent, led by a 17 percent shift among independents.

The recently passed House version of healthcare reform includes both a public option and funding for optional end-of-life consultations (the so-called death panels), and it's possible the final bill will retain those provisions. But the measure of Palin's power lies not in her capacity to write legislation or win national elections but in her ability to torpedo the democratic process, inducing legislative paralysis and, perhaps more important, driving discussion of more progressive options off the road. Palin's death panel crusade has provided a chilling lesson: that a minority armed with conspiracy theories is capable of occupying the national political discourse as long as it has conviction and a mouthpiece. Indeed, Palin is still at it, taking to her Facebook page to denounce the House bill as a theft of American "freedom" and reiterating the death panel lie. Should Congress recess without a healthcare bill on Obama's desk, one can expect Palin to bum rush the field once again.

A crucial aspect of Palinism is Sarah Palin—the brand. Her name alone instantly conjures up a pungent brew of images, phrases and associations: just an average hockey mom of five, a pit bull with lipstick, beauty queen, moose hunter, long-distance runner, sexy librarian, winker, rogue. Palinism works by draping hard-right policy in a winning personal story and just-folks rhetoric. Its genius rests in its ability to magically absorb inconvenient facts and mutually contradictory realities into an unassailable personal narrative. In the Palin universe, her unwed pregnant teenage daughter, Bristol, is somehow a poster child for abstinence-only education; hence criticism of Palin's sex-ed policies is an attack on her family. Although Palin is an aggressive advocate for opening up the United States' oil reserves to drilling instead of investing in renewable energy, she labels herself pro-environment, a stance exemplified by her love of shooting animals or her husband's hobby of racing snowmobiles across the tundra. And who'd dare question Palin's foreign policy credentials, when her son Track shipped out to Iraq after high school?

Palin perfected this technique of substituting the personal for the political during the campaign, and she now plans a whistle-stop tour of the places she famously called the "real America" to hawk her hastily ghostwritten memoir, reprising her Campaign '08 rallies with appearances in Ohio, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Florida. But she's learned a thing or two about the dangers of dealing with journalists who take their jobs seriously, and so, beyond Oprah and Barbara Walters, she'll stick to the right-wing cable and talk-radio circuit. She's also banned all cellphones and recording devices from her appearances. She will, in other words, be talking to her people inside the Palin bubble.

Those of us who reside in the parts of America Palin regards as unreal may secretly enjoy watching the bubble bounce along, relishing her run-on sentences and looney-tunes lines. But the more we chuckle, the more indignant and impassioned the Palin army becomes. That's the bedeviling thing about Sarah Palin, and the secret to her success: neither the left nor the right can get enough of her.

RICHARD KIM AND BETSY REED

Richard Kim and Betsy Reed are the editors of Going Rouge: Sarah Palin—An American Nightmare, *from which this article is adapted. The book is available only by direct order from ORbooks.com.*

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Senator Joe Lieberman And the Public Option

If public option's in the bill, Joe says,
He'll work to make a filibuster stick.
If so, insurance giants then will cheer.
The poor will think of Joe when they are sick.

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Outrageous Fortuño

COMMENT

On October 23 a hideous plume of black smoke filled the sky in San Juan, Puerto Rico, emanating from a gas tank explosion at a storage facility of the Caribbean Petroleum Corporation (CAPECO) in the nearby municipality of Bayamón. The explosion and ensuing fire, which forced the evacuation of more than 1,000 people and caused President Obama to declare a federal disaster, is an ominous metaphor for Puerto Rico's current state. The combination of a four-year recession, a $3.2 billion deficit and a toxic Republican-style governor, Luis Fortuño, has turned the island into a political powder keg.

After the explosion, the head of the FBI's office in Puerto Rico announced a federal investigation into whether the explosion was the result of sabotage or terrorism (the investigation has ruled this out). This dovetailed neatly with the strategy employed by the island's ruling New Progressive Party (PNP) of denouncing as terrorists labor leaders who had organized a general strike the previous week. Using Plaza Las Américas—the Caribbean's largest shopping mall and the most glaring symbol of US consumerism on the island—as a staging ground, the unions had amassed tens of thousands of protesters to denounce Governor Fortuño's recent announcement of layoffs of government workers, which would bring the year's total to about 17,000. In an economy where government workers make up 21 percent of the total workforce, these measures—employed ostensibly to protect Puerto Rico's credit rating, which is threatened with junk status—struck a deep chord of resentment among Puerto Ricans. And no wonder, since the official unemployment rate is 16.2 percent—closer to 25 percent if the underemployed are included.

The week after Fortuño's announcement, during a press conference about the development of an eastern port near a recently closed military base, the governor had to dodge an egg hurled at him by Roberto García Díaz, a 44-year-old former employee of the base. The *huevazo*, or "egg-throw," became a major news story, echoing the famed shoe-throwing at George W. Bush in Iraq and indicating that the island's usually raucous political environment had been kicked up a notch. While PNP functionaries fearmongered about an element that wanted to sow chaos in Puerto Rico, García Díaz became something of a folk hero.

Puerto Rico has been an incorporated territory of the United States since 1898, and although its residents were granted citizenship in 1917, the UN and much of the world still recognize it as a colony (in June the UN Special Committee on Decolonization called on Washington to expedite a self-determination process). Since 1952, when its euphemistic status as a commonwealth or "free associated state" was coined, the island's leadership has oscillated between the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), which favors the status quo, and the PNP, which favors statehood. The Independence Party, which consistently garners between 2 and 5 percent of the vote, represents a constituency that has been repressed by the US federal government since a series of nationalist uprisings that began in 1937.

Although the PNP's leaders have historically oscillated between the mainland Democrats and Republicans, the new regime seems to be living out a GOP fantasy of regaining power lost in last year's presidential election. In addition to his government-downsizing measures, Fortuño—a board member of the Republican National Hispanic Association, which includes party loyalists such as Senators Orrin Hatch and John Ensign, RNC chair Michael Steele and Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform—has emboldened a social conservatism that is suddenly ascendant on this largely Catholic-yet-carnivalesque island. A few weeks ago it was announced that several far from obscene books, such as Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá's *El Entierro de Cortijo* and Carlos Fuentes's *Aura*, would be banned from public school libraries because they contain "coarse language." Austere legislative measures, including closing bars much earlier and lowering the blood alcohol limit for drivers to .02 percent from the standard .08 percent, are close to being enacted.

Fortuño's policies even earned him a tongue-lashing on MTV Latin America's awards show, which was held on the day of the general strike. After sporting a T-shirt that read, FORTUÑO—DODGE THIS! alternative rapper René Pérez Joglar, *aka* Residente of the group Calle 13, denounced the governor as a "son of a whore" because of the layoff announcement. The PNP tried to spin the insult as an attack on Puerto Rican women, and San Juan Mayor Jorge Santini promptly canceled Residente's much-anticipated show at the island's largest arena. But on November 2 a group of female activists held a semi-nude protest against Fortuño's policies, saying his cutbacks to agencies advocating for women deprived them of human rights.

Denouncing Residente's edgy, Rabelaisian rants as trafficking in obscenity masks the obscenity of an economic policy that compounds the worst effects of this deep recession. Edwin Meléndez, an economist who directs Hunter College's Center for Puerto Rican Studies, suggested the Fortuño government needs to look more closely at other options, such as offering early retirement with full pension guarantees and renegotiation of debts incurred by government programs with attached revenue streams.

Despite the massive public protest against his policies, Fortuño is sticking to his guns. He announced in early November that 7,000 of the layoffs would be delayed until January because of faulty paperwork by a private consulting firm. The move seemed like an attempt to lessen the immediate impact of the layoffs while refusing to reconsider them.

For many Puerto Ricans, the current problems stem from a deeper, much more long-term malaise: the island's unsettled political status. Yet another plebiscite proposal, which critics say is stacked toward getting Puerto Ricans to vote for statehood, is creeping through the House in Washington. Now more than ever, it's time for a strong coalition of Puerto Ricans on the island and the US mainland to come up with an alternative—a people's movement, perhaps seeking stronger economic ties to the Caribbean and Latin America, to demand social justice for 4 million effectively second-class US citizens.

As Residente said on MTV, "Latin America is not complete without Puerto Rico, and Puerto Rico is not free." ED MORALES

Ed Morales, a freelance writer and filmmaker, is the author of Living in Spanglish *and co-director of the documentary* Whose Barrio?, *about gentrification in East Harlem.*

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Alexander Cockburn

A Year of Obama

A year after Obama's triumphant election, hauling substantial majorities in the House and Senate on his coattails, the progressive sector sits trying to warm its hands before the bonfire of all its hopes. An awful "health reform" bill has cleared the House and is now headed for marriage with some even more ghastly Senate version from which we may be saved only by a filibustering Lieberman, Obama's initial mentor in the Senate.

Meanwhile, the White House is furiously denying reports from such well-regarded correspondents as David Martin of CBS that Gen. Stanley McChrystal will get "most, if not all," of what he wants. Instead of giving him the boot for insolent public challenges to the civilian executive power, Obama will order the dispatch of about 40,000 new troops (CBS's figure) to Afghanistan, representing a long-term commitment as fateful as Lyndon Johnson's surrender to General Westmoreland's request in Vietnam nearly half a century ago.

The progressives poke about among entrails of the House health bill and find evidence of mini-victories like the survival in vestigial form of the "public option"—a fetish phrase guaranteed to raise a loyal cheer whatever the realities, which in this case aren't hard to discover.

As Rose Ann DeMoro, executive director of the California Nurses Association, put it in the wake of the House vote, "The principal beneficiary is not Americans' health but the bottom line of the insurance industry, which stands to harvest tens of billions of dollars in additional profits ordered by the federal government." Or as Representative Eric Massa of New York warned before the vote, "At the highest level, this bill will enshrine in law the monopolistic powers of the private health insurance industry, period."

And of course the House bill reduces public protection for women, with its rollback of reproductive rights in the anti-abortion amendment. The "public option" remnant? It will be available to about 2 percent of people under age 65, mostly those now not covered who buy insurance on their own.

It is as ridiculous to claim that this "health reform" bill has anything substantive to do with beneficial social change as to believe there have been any encouraging shifts in foreign policy since the Democrats took over. Only recently we had the surreal spectacle of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton claiming in a press conference that what Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu "has offered in specifics of a restraint on the policy of settlements, which he has just described—no new starts, for example—is unprecedented in the context of the prior two negotiations."

Obama's Afghan policy evolved on the campaign trail last year as a one-liner designed to deflect charges that he was a peacenik on Iraq. He formed a foreign policy team mostly composed of Clinton-era neoliberal hawks, headed by Hillary Clinton and Richard Holbrooke. Then he ordered 17,000 new US troops to be deployed to Afghanistan.

If on his second day in office he'd announced a full and complete review of US aims in Afghanistan, with no option left off the table, he'd have had some purchase on the situation. But the months drifted by, and finally the worsening situation forced a review of Afghan policy—precisely when Obama's poll numbers were dropping, the war lobby was heartened and the liberals were already dejected by Obama's surrender to Goldman Sachs and Wall Street, and by his fumbling retreats in the health fight.

It's exactly as I predicted from the start. The past year has yielded one surrender by the administration after another—whether it be renditions, phone-tapping or an accelerated schedule in giving the finger to organized labor, whose troops had done the most to put Obama in the White House. Even before his election last November, Obama extinguished all hopes—risible though they were to those who had followed the senator's brief political career—that he would harvest public fury at Wall Street and curb the power of the banks. He voted for the Bush/Paulson bank bailout and then hired Lawrence Summers—one of the prime architects of the country's economic death plunge—as his chief economic adviser. Today Summers stands alongside Obama in the public pillory, with the rising unemployment figures hanging round his neck.

If you want to see the year's political price for dropping the ball on the greatest political opportunity we'll see in our lifetime to curb the power of Wall Street and set a new economic course, just look at the recent election numbers in Virginia, which voted for a Democratic president last year for the first time since the Johnson sweep of 1964 and handed the Democrats three Republican House seats. In these same three districts earlier in November, Republican Bob McDonnell—running on a we-need-jobs platform and against a terrible climate bill built on junk science—clinched the governor's race by huge margins as independents, seniors, suburban voters and stay-at-home Democrats took out their disillusion with Obama.

Progressives delight in depicting a Republican Party captured by the nutballs, dooming itself to the margins. Don't believe it. The "sophisticated right" (so described by C. Wright Mills sixty years ago) equipped with big Republican money will assert its power over the "wild-eyed Utopian capitalists" (Mills again). Glenn Beck will burst the envelope he's already pushing or be impaled on some disclosure from his fraught psychic past. Sarah Palin will be similarly discredited as a public figure. Next November Republicans can look forward to recapture of the House and a whittling down of Democrats in the Senate by five or six. Then Obama can fire Rahm Emanuel and hire David Gergen, just as Bill Clinton did in the summer of 1993. ■

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Katha Pollitt

Whose Team Is It, Anyway?

You know what I don't want to hear right now about the Stupak-Pitts amendment banning abortion coverage from federally subsidized health insurance policies? That it's the price of reform, and prochoice women should shut up and take one for the team. "If you want to rebuild the American welfare state," Peter Beinart writes in the Daily Beast, "there is no alternative" than for Democrats to abandon "cultural" issues like gender and racial equality. Hey, Peter, Representative Stupak and your sixty-four Democratic supporters, Jim Wallis and other antichoice "progressive" Christians, men: why don't *you* take one for the team for a change and see how you like it?

For example, budget hawks in Congress say they'll vote against the bill because it's too expensive. Maybe you could win them over if you volunteered to cut out funding for male-exclusive stuff, like prostate cancer, Viagra, male infertility, vasectomies, growth-hormone shots for short little boys, long-term care for macho guys who won't wear motorcycle helmets and, I dunno, psychotherapy for pedophile priests. Men could always pay in advance for an insurance policy rider, as women are blithely told they can do if Stupak becomes part of the final bill.

President Obama, too, worries about the deficit. Maybe you could help him out by sacrificing your denomination's tax exemption. The Catholic Church would be a good place to start, and it wouldn't even be unfair, since the blatant politicking of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops on abortion violates the spirit of the ban on electoral meddling by tax-exempt religious institutions. Why should antichoicers be the only people who get to refuse to let their taxes support something they dislike? You don't want your tax dollars to pay, even in the most notional way, for women's abortion care, a legal medical procedure that one in three American women will have in her lifetime? I don't want to pay for your misogynist fairy tales and sour-old-man hierarchies.

Women Democrats have taken an awful lot of hits for the team lately. Many of us didn't vote for Hillary Clinton in the primary because the goal of electing a woman seemed less important than the goal of electing the best possible president. Only a self-hater or a featherhead didn't feel some pain about that. And although women are hardly alone in this, we've seen some pretty big hopes set aside in the first year of the Obama administration. The Paycheck Fairness Act, which would expand women's protections against sexism in the workplace, is on the back burner. Meanwhile, the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships is not only alive and well; it's newly staffed with antichoicers like Alexia Kelley of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, who, as Frances Kissling notes in *Salon*, has compared abortion to torture.

I know what you're thinking: conservative Democrats like Stupak took Republican districts to win us both houses of Congress. Thanks a lot, Howard Dean, whose bright idea it was to recruit them, but those majorities would not be there, and Obama would not be in the White House, if not for prochoice women and men—their votes, talent, money, organizational capacity and shoe leather. We knocked ourselves out, and it wasn't so that religious reactionaries like Stupak—who, as Jeff Sharlet writes in *Salon*, is a member of the Family, the secretive right-wing Christian-supremacist Congressional coven—would control both parties. Elections have consequences, you say? Exactly: Obama, the prochoice, prowoman candidate, won. Stupak didn't put him in the White House, and neither did the Catholic bishops or the white antifeminist welfare staters of Beinart's imagination. We did. And we deserve better from Obama than sound bites like "this is a healthcare bill, not an abortion bill." Abortion *is* healthcare. That's the whole point.

What makes the Stupak fiasco especially pathetic is the fumbling response from prochoicers. Missouri Democrat Claire McCaskill would not be in the Senate today were it not for prochoice and feminist supporters like EMILY's List. How does she thank us? By telling Joe Scarborough that Stupak isn't so bad, that it won't affect "the majority of America"—just low-income women—and that it's "an example of having to govern with moderates." So people who'll tip healthcare reform into the trash unless it blocks abortion access are the moderates now! (McCaskill took it back later that day, but the damage was done.) If I ever give that woman another dime, shoot me.

The big prochoice and feminist organizations are up in arms—NOW and Planned Parenthood want to see healthcare reform voted down if Stupak is retained—but writing in the Daily Beast, Dana Goldstein nicely captures the bewilderment of leaders caught by surprise. "It's the feeling that you've been rolled," said Eleanor Smeal, of Feminist Majority. Or haven't been paying attention. Smeal was onto something, though, when she told Goldstein, "Here we are playing nice guy again, we didn't want to make a fuss." Consciously or unconsciously, by not organizing in advance to insist on coverage of abortion, prochoicers set themselves up to be out-maneuvered. In fact, as Sharon Lerner reported on TheNation.com, Democrats stood by while antichoicers kept contraception out of the reform bill's list of basic benefits all insurers must cover. So much for the "common ground" approach where we all agree that birth control is the way to lower the abortion rate.

Enough already. Prochoicers have been taking one for the team since 1976, when Congress passed the Hyde amendment, which Jimmy Carter would later defend with the immortal comment, "There are many things in life that are not fair." Time for the theocrats and male chauvinists to give something up for the greater good—to say nothing of the twenty prochoicers, all men, who supported Stupak out of sheer careerism. After all, if it weren't for prochoicers, there wouldn't be much of a team for them to play on. ■

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Naomi Klein

Copenhagen: Seattle Grows Up

The other day I received a pre-publication copy of *The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle*, by David Solnit and Rebecca Solnit. It's set to come out ten years after a historic coalition of activists shut down the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle, the spark that ignited a global anticorporate movement.

The book is a fascinating account of what really happened in Seattle, but when I spoke to David Solnit, the direct-action guru who helped engineer the shutdown, I found him less interested in reminiscing about 1999 than in talking about the upcoming United Nations climate change summit in Copenhagen and the "climate justice" actions he is helping to organize across the United States on November 30. "This is definitely a Seattle-type moment," Solnit told me. "People are ready to throw down."

There is certainly a Seattle quality to the Copenhagen mobilization: the huge range of groups that will be there; the diverse tactics that will be on display; and the developing-country governments ready to bring activist demands into the summit. But Copenhagen is not merely a Seattle do-over. It feels, instead, as though the progressive tectonic plates are shifting, creating a movement that builds on the strengths of an earlier era but also learns from its mistakes.

The big criticism of the movement the media insisted on calling "antiglobalization" was always that it had a laundry list of grievances and few concrete alternatives. The movement converging on Copenhagen, in contrast, is about a single issue—climate change—but it weaves a coherent narrative about its cause, and its cures, that incorporates virtually every issue on the planet. In this narrative, our climate is changing not simply because of particular polluting practices but because of the underlying logic of capitalism, which values short-term profit and perpetual growth above all else. Our governments would have us believe that the same logic can now be harnessed to solve the climate crisis—by creating a tradable commodity called "carbon" and by transforming forests and farmland into "sinks" that will supposedly offset our runaway emissions.

Climate-justice activists in Copenhagen will argue that, far from solving the climate crisis, carbon-trading represents an unprecedented privatization of the atmosphere, and that offsets and sinks threaten to become a resource grab of colonial proportions. Not only will these "market-based solutions" fail to solve the climate crisis, but this failure will dramatically deepen poverty and inequality, because the poorest and most vulnerable people are the primary victims of climate change—as well as the primary guinea pigs for these emissions-trading schemes.

But activists in Copenhagen won't simply say no to all this. They will aggressively advance solutions that simultaneously reduce emissions and narrow inequality. Unlike at previous summits, where alternatives seemed like an afterthought, in Copenhagen the alternatives will take center stage. For instance, the direct-action coalition Climate Justice Action has called on activists to storm the conference center on December 16. Many will do this as part of the "bike bloc," riding together on an as yet unrevealed "irresistible new machine of resistance" made up of hundreds of old bicycles. The goal of the action is not to shut down the summit, Seattle-style, but to open it up, transforming it into "a space to talk about *our* agenda, an agenda from below, an agenda of climate justice, of real solutions against their false ones.... This day will be ours."

Some of the solutions on offer from the activist camp are the same ones the global justice movement has been championing for years: local, sustainable agriculture; smaller, decentralized power projects; respect for indigenous land rights; leaving fossil fuels in the ground; loosening protections on green technology; and paying for these transformations by taxing financial transactions and canceling foreign debts. Some solutions are new, like the mounting demand that rich countries pay "climate debt" reparations to the poor. These are tall orders, but we have all just seen the kind of resources our governments can marshal when it comes to saving the elites. As one pre-Copenhagen slogan puts it: "If the climate were a bank, it would have been saved"—not abandoned to the brutality of the market.

In addition to the coherent narrative and the focus on alternatives, there are plenty of other changes too: a more thoughtful approach to direct action, one that recognizes the urgency to do more than just talk but is determined not to play into the tired scripts of cops-versus-protesters. "Our action is one of civil disobedience," say the organizers of the December 16 action. "We will overcome any physical barriers that stand in our way—but we will not respond with violence if the police [try] to escalate the situation." (That said, there is no way the two-week summit will not include a few running battles between cops and kids in black; this is Europe, after all.)

A decade ago, in an op-ed in the *New York Times* published after Seattle was shut down, I wrote that a new movement advocating a radically different form of globalization "just had its coming-out party." What will be the significance of Copenhagen? I put that question to John Jordan, whose prediction of what eventually happened in Seattle I quoted in my book *No Logo*. He replied: "If Seattle was the movement of movements' coming-out party, then maybe Copenhagen will be a celebration of our coming of age."

He cautions, however, that growing up doesn't mean playing it safe, eschewing civil disobedience in favor of staid meetings. "I hope we have grown up to become much more disobedient," Jordan said, "because life on this world of ours may well be terminated because of too many acts of obedience." ■

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An updated tenth-anniversary edition of Naomi Klein's *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* comes out in November.

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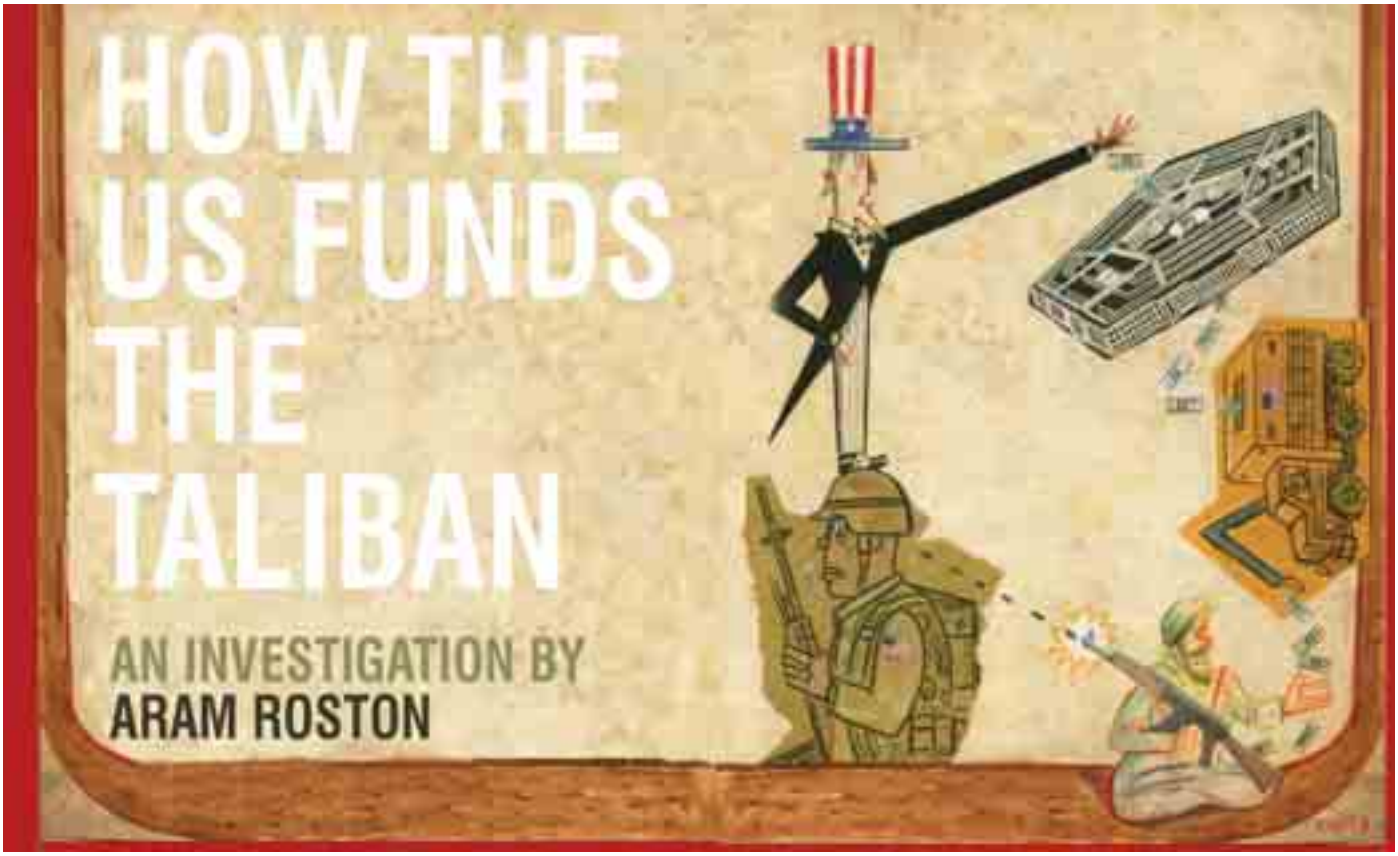

With Pentagon cash, contractors bribe insurgents not to attack supply lines for US troops.

On October 29, 2001, while the Taliban's rule over Afghanistan was under assault, the regime's ambassador in Islamabad gave a chaotic press conference in front of several dozen reporters sitting on the grass. On the Taliban diplomat's right sat his interpreter, Ahmad Rateb Popal, a man with an imposing presence. Like the ambassador, Popal wore a black turban, and he had a huge bushy beard. He had a black patch over his right eye socket, a prosthetic left arm and a deformed right hand, the result of injuries from an explosives mishap during an old operation against the Soviets in Kabul.

But Popal was more than just a former mujahedeen. In 1988, a year before the Soviets fled Afghanistan, Popal had been charged in the United States with conspiring to import more than a kilo of heroin. Court records show he was released from prison in 1997.

Flash forward to 2009, and Afghanistan is ruled by Popal's cousin President Hamid Karzai. Popal has cut his huge beard down to a neatly trimmed one and has become an immensely wealthy businessman, along with his brother Rashid Popal, who in a separate case pleaded guilty to a heroin charge in 1996 in Brooklyn. The Popal brothers control the huge Watan Group in Afghanistan, a consortium engaged in telecommunications, logistics and, most important, security. Watan Risk Management, the Popals' private military arm, is one of the few dozen private security companies in Afghanistan. One of Watan's enterprises, key to the war effort, is protecting convoys of Afghan trucks heading from Kabul to Kandahar, carrying American supplies.

Welcome to the wartime contracting bazaar in Afghanistan. It is a virtual carnival of improbable characters and shady connections, with former CIA officials and ex–military officers joining hands with former Taliban and mujahedeen to collect US government funds in the name of the war effort.

In this grotesque carnival, the US military's contractors are forced to pay suspected insurgents to protect American supply routes. It is an accepted fact of the military logistics operation in Afghanistan that the US government funds the very forces American troops are fighting. And it is a deadly irony, because these funds add up to a huge amount of money for the Taliban. "It's a big part of their income," one of the top Afghan government security officials told *The Nation* in an interview. In fact, US military officials in Kabul estimate that a minimum of 10 percent of the Pentagon's logistics contracts—hundreds of millions of dollars—consists of payments to insurgents.

Understanding how this situation came to pass requires untangling two threads. The first is the insider dealing that determines who wins and who loses in Afghan business, and the second is the troubling mechanism by which "private security" ensures that the US supply convoys traveling these ancient trade routes aren't ambushed by insurgents.

A good place to pick up the first thread is with a small firm awarded a US military logistics contract worth hundreds of millions of dollars: NCL Holdings. Like the Popals' Watan Risk, NCL is a licensed security company in Afghanistan.

What NCL Holdings is most notorious for in Kabul contracting circles, though, is the identity of its chief principal,

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Hamed Wardak. He is the young American son of Afghanistan's current defense minister, Gen. Abdul Rahim Wardak, who was a leader of the mujahedeen against the Soviets. Hamed Wardak has plunged into business as well as policy. He was raised and schooled in the United States, graduating as valedictorian from Georgetown University in 1997. He earned a Rhodes scholarship and interned at the neoconservative think tank the American Enterprise Institute. That internship was to play an important role in his life, for it was at AEI that he forged alliances with some of the premier figures in American conservative foreign policy circles, such as the late Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick.

Wardak incorporated NCL in the United States early in 2007, although the firm may have operated in Afghanistan before then. It made sense to set up shop in Washington, because of Wardak's connections there. On NCL's advisory board, for example, is Milton Bearden, a well-known former CIA officer. Bearden is an important voice on Afghanistan issues; in October he was a witness before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where Senator John Kerry, the chair, introduced him as "a legendary former CIA case officer and a clearheaded thinker and writer." It is not every defense contracting company that has such an influential adviser.

But the biggest deal that NCL got—the contract that brought it into Afghanistan's major leagues—was Host Nation Trucking. Earlier this year the firm, with no apparent trucking experience, was named one of the six companies that would handle the bulk of US trucking in Afghanistan, bringing supplies to the web of bases and remote outposts scattered across the country.

At first the contract was large but not gargantuan. And then that suddenly changed, like an immense garden coming into bloom. Over the summer, citing the coming "surge" and a new doctrine, "Money as a Weapons System," the US military expanded the contract 600 percent for NCL and the five other companies. The contract documentation warns of dire consequences if more is not spent: "service members will not get food, water, equipment, and ammunition they require." Each of the military's six trucking contracts was bumped up to $360 million, or a total of nearly $2.2 billion. Put it in this perspective: this single two-year effort to hire Afghan trucks and truckers was worth 10 percent of the annual Afghan gross domestic product. NCL, the firm run by the defense minister's well-connected son, had struck pure contracting gold.

Host Nation Trucking does indeed keep the US military efforts alive in Afghanistan. "We supply everything the army needs to survive here," one American trucking executive told me. "We bring them their toilet paper, their water, their fuel, their guns, their vehicles." The epicenter is Bagram Air Base, just an hour north of Kabul, from which virtually everything in Afghanistan is trucked to the outer reaches of what the Army calls "the Battlespace"—that is, the entire country. Parked near Entry Control Point 3, the trucks line up, shifting gears and sending up clouds of dust as they prepare for their various missions across the country.

The real secret to trucking in Afghanistan is ensuring security on the perilous roads, controlled by warlords, tribal militias, insurgents and Taliban commanders. The American executive I talked to was fairly specific about it: "The Army is basically paying the Taliban not to shoot at them. It is Department of Defense money." That is something everyone seems to agree on.

Mike Hanna is the project manager for a trucking company called Afghan American Army Services. The company, which still operates in Afghanistan, had been trucking for the United States for years but lost out in the Host Nation Trucking contract that NCL won. Hanna explained the security realities quite simply: "You are paying the people in the local areas—some are warlords, some are politicians in the police force—to move your trucks through."

Hanna explained that the prices charged are different, depending on the route: "We're basically being extorted. Where you don't pay, you're going to get attacked. We just have our field guys go down there, and they pay off who they need to." Sometimes, he says, the extortion fee is high, and sometimes it is low. "Moving ten trucks, it is probably $800 per truck to move through an area. It's based on the number of trucks and what you're carrying. If you have fuel trucks, they are going to charge you more. If you have dry trucks, they're not going to charge you as much. If you are carrying MRAPs or Humvees, they are going to charge you more."

'We're basically being extorted. Where you don't pay, you're going to get attacked,' says Mike Hanna, a US military contractor in Afghanistan.

Hanna says it is just a necessary evil. "If you tell me not to pay these insurgents in this area, the chances of my trucks getting attacked increase exponentially."

Whereas in Iraq the private security industry has been dominated by US and global firms like Blackwater, operating as de facto arms of the US government, in Afghanistan there are lots of local players as well. As a result, the industry in Kabul is far more dog-eat-dog. "Every warlord has his security company," is the way one executive explained it to me.

In theory, private security companies in Kabul are heavily regulated, although the reality is different. Thirty-nine companies had licenses until September, when another dozen were granted licenses. Many licensed companies are politically connected: just as NCL is owned by the son of the defense minister and Watan Risk Management is run by President Karzai's cousins, the Asia Security Group is controlled by Hashmat Karzai, another relative of the president. The company has blocked off an entire street in the expensive Sherpur District. Another security firm is controlled by the parlia-

Aram Roston is an investigative journalist and the author of The Man Who Pushed America to War *(Nation Books, 2008).* *Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute.*

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mentary speaker's son, sources say. And so on.

In the same way, the Afghan trucking industry, key to logistics operations, is often tied to important figures and tribal leaders. One major hauler in Afghanistan, Afghan International Trucking (AIT), paid $20,000 a month in kickbacks to a US Army contracting official, according to the official's plea agreement in US court in August. AIT is a very well-connected firm: it is run by the 25-year-old nephew of Gen. Baba Jan, a former Northern Alliance commander and later a Kabul police chief. In an interview, Baba Jan, a cheerful and charismatic leader, insisted he had nothing to do with his nephew's corporate enterprise.

But the heart of the matter is that insurgents are getting paid for safe passage because there are few other ways to bring goods to the combat outposts and forward operating bases where soldiers need them. By definition, many outposts are situated in hostile terrain, in the southern parts of Afghanistan. The security firms don't really protect convoys of American military goods here, because they simply can't; they need the Taliban's cooperation.

Insurgents are getting paid for safe passage because there are few other ways to bring goods where soldiers need them.

One of the big problems for the companies that ship American military supplies across the country is that they are banned from arming themselves with any weapon heavier than a rifle. That makes them ineffective for battling Taliban attacks on a convoy. "They are shooting the drivers from 3,000 feet away with PKMs," a trucking company executive in Kabul told me. "They are using RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] that will blow up an up-armed vehicle. So the security companies are tied up. Because of the rules, security companies can only carry AK-47s, and that's just a joke. I carry an AK—and that's just to shoot myself if I have to!"

The rules are there for a good reason: to guard against devastating collateral damage by private security forces. Still, as Hanna of Afghan American Army Services points out, "An AK-47 versus a rocket-propelled grenade—you are going to lose!" That said, at least one of the Host Nation Trucking companies has tried to do battle instead of paying off insurgents and warlords. It is a US-owned firm called Four Horsemen International. Instead of providing payments, it has tried to fight off attackers. And it has paid the price in lives, with horrendous casualties. FHI, like many other firms, refused to talk publicly; but I've been told by insiders in the security industry that FHI's convoys are attacked on virtually every mission.

For the most part, the security firms do as they must to survive. A veteran American manager in Afghanistan who has worked there as both a soldier and a private security contractor in the field told me, "What we are doing is paying warlords associated with the Taliban, because none of our security elements is able to deal with the threat." He's an Army veteran with years of Special Forces experience, and he's not happy about what's being done. He says that at a minimum American military forces should try to learn more about who is getting paid off.

"Most escorting is done by the Taliban," an Afghan private security official told me. He's a Pashto and former mujahedeen commander who has his finger on the pulse of the military situation and the security industry. And he works with one of the trucking companies carrying US supplies. "Now the government is so weak," he added, "everyone is paying the Taliban."

To Afghan trucking officials, this is barely even something to worry about. One woman I met was an extraordinary entrepreneur who had built up a trucking business in this male-dominated field. She told me the security company she had hired dealt directly with Taliban leaders in the south. Paying the Taliban leaders meant they would send along an escort to ensure that no other insurgents would attack. In fact, she said, they just needed two armed Taliban vehicles. "Two Taliban is enough," she told me. "One in the front and one in the back." She shrugged. "You cannot work otherwise. Otherwise it is not possible."

Which leads us back to the case of Watan Risk, the firm run by Ahmad Rateb Popal and Rashid Popal, the Karzai family relatives and former drug dealers. Watan is known to control one key stretch of road that all the truckers use: the strategic route to Kandahar called Highway 1. Think of it as the road to the war—to the south and to the west. If the Army wants to get supplies down to Helmand, for example, the trucks must make their way through Kandahar.

Watan Risk, according to seven different security and trucking company officials, is the sole provider of security along this route. The reason is simple: Watan is allied with the local warlord who controls the road. Watan's company website is quite impressive, and claims its personnel "are diligently screened to weed out all ex-militia members, supporters of the Taliban, or individuals with loyalty to warlords, drug barons, or any other group opposed to international support of the democratic process." Whatever screening methods it uses, Watan's secret weapon to protect American supplies heading through Kandahar is a man named Commander Ruhullah. Said to be a handsome man in his 40s, Ruhullah has an oddly high-pitched voice. He wears traditional *salwar kameez* and a Rolex watch. He rarely, if ever, associates with Westerners. He commands a large group of irregular fighters with no known government affiliation, and his name, security officials tell me, inspires obedience or fear in villages along the road.

It is a dangerous business, of course: until last spring Ruhullah had competition—a one-legged warlord named Commander Abdul Khaliq. He was killed in an ambush.

So Ruhullah is the surviving road warrior for that stretch of highway. According to witnesses, he works like this: he waits until there are hundreds of trucks ready to convoy south down the highway. Then he gets his men together, setting them up in 4x4s and pickups. Witnesses say he does not limit his arsenal to AK-47s but uses any weapons he can get. His chief weapon is his reputation. And for that, Watan is paid royally, collecting a fee

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for each truck that passes through his corridor. The American trucking official told me that Ruhullah "charges $1,500 per truck to go to Kandahar. Just 300 kilometers."

It's hard to pinpoint what this is, exactly—security, extortion or a form of "insurance." Then there is the question, Does Ruhullah have ties to the Taliban? That's impossible to know. As an American private security veteran familiar with the route said, "He works both sides… whatever is most profitable. He's the main commander. He's got to be involved with the Taliban. How much, no one knows."

Even NCL, the company owned by Hamed Wardak, pays. Two sources with direct knowledge tell me that NCL sends its portion of US logistics goods in Watan's and Ruhullah's convoys. Sources say NCL is billed $500,000 per month for Watan's services. To underline the point: NCL, operating on a $360 million contract from the US military, and owned by the Afghan defense minister's son, is paying millions per year from those funds to a company owned by President Karzai's cousins, for protection.

Hamed Wardak wouldn't return my phone calls. Milt Bearden, the former CIA officer affiliated with the company, wouldn't speak with me either. There's nothing wrong with Bearden engaging in business in Afghanistan, but disclosure of his business interests might have been expected when testifying on US policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan. After all, NCL stands to make or lose hundreds of millions based on the whims of US policy-makers.

I asked Col. David Haight what he thought of paying off insurgents. 'The American soldier in me is repulsed by it.… But it is what it is.'

It is certainly worth asking why NCL, a company with no known trucking experience, and little security experience to speak of, would win a contract worth $360 million. Plenty of Afghan insiders are asking questions. "Why would the US government give him a contract if he is the son of the minister of defense?" That's what Mahmoud Karzai asked me. He is the brother of President Karzai, and he himself has been treated in the press as a poster boy for access to government officials. The *New York Times* even profiled him in a highly critical piece. In his defense, Karzai emphasized that he, at least, has refrained from US government or Afghan government contracting. He pointed out, as others have, that Hamed Wardak had little security or trucking background before his company received security and trucking contracts from the Defense Department. "That's a questionable business practice," he said. "They shouldn't give it to him. How come that's not questioned?"

I did get the opportunity to ask General Wardak, Hamed's father, about it. He is quite dapper, although he is no longer the debonair "Gucci commander" Bearden once described. I asked Wardak about his son and NCL. "I've tried to be straightforward and correct and fight corruption all my life," the defense minister said. "This has been something people have tried to use against me, so it has been painful."

Wardak would speak only briefly about NCL. The issue seems to have produced a rift with his son. "I was against it from the beginning, and that's why we have not talked for a long time. I have never tried to support him or to use my power or influence that he should benefit."

When I told Wardak that his son's company had a US contract worth as much as $360 million, he did a double take. "This is impossible," he said. "I do not believe this."

I believed the general when he said he really didn't know what his son was up to. But cleaning up what look like insider deals may be easier than the next step: shutting down the money pipeline going from DoD contracts to potential insurgents.

Two years ago, a top Afghan security official told me, Afghanistan's intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security, had alerted the American military to the problem. The NDS delivered what I'm told are "very detailed" reports to the Americans explaining how the Taliban are profiting from protecting convoys of US supplies.

The Afghan intelligence service even offered a solution: what if the United States were to take the tens of millions paid to security contractors and instead set up a dedicated and professional convoy support unit to guard its logistics lines? The suggestion went nowhere.

The bizarre fact is that the practice of buying the Taliban's protection is not a secret. I asked Col. David Haight, who commands the Third Brigade of the Tenth Mountain Division, about it. After all, part of Highway 1 runs through his area of operations. What did he think about security companies paying off insurgents? "The American soldier in me is repulsed by it," he said in an interview in his office at FOB Shank in Logar Province. "But I know that it is what it is: essentially paying the enemy, saying, 'Hey, don't hassle me.' I don't like it, but it is what it is."

As a military official in Kabul explained contracting in Afghanistan overall, "We understand that across the board 10 percent to 20 percent goes to the insurgents. My intel guy would say it is closer to 10 percent. Generally it is happening in logistics."

In a statement to *The Nation* about Host Nation Trucking, Col. Wayne Shanks, the chief public affairs officer for the international forces in Afghanistan, said that military officials are "aware of allegations that procurement funds may find their way into the hands of insurgent groups, but we do not directly support or condone this activity, if it is occurring." He added that, despite oversight, "the relationships between contractors and their subcontractors, as well as between subcontractors and others in their operational communities, are not entirely transparent."

In any case, the main issue is not that the US military is turning a blind eye to the problem. Many officials acknowledge what is going on while also expressing a deep disquiet about the situation. The trouble is that—as with so much in Afghanistan—the United States doesn't seem to know how to fix it. ■

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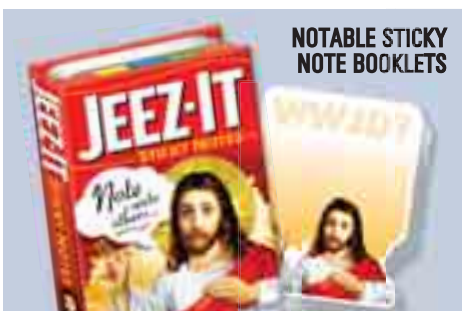

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The Fifty-Year War

We learned so much, at such cost, in Vietnam. Why must we learn it all again in Afghanistan?

by JONATHAN SCHELL

CHRISTOPHER SERRA

I was about to write that there can be no military solution to the war in Afghanistan, only a political one. But I almost fainted with boredom and had to stop. Who, as President Obama lengthily ponders his decisions regarding the war, wants to repeat a point that's been made 11,000 times before? Is there anyone on earth who doesn't know by now that you can't win a guerrilla war without winning the "hearts and minds" of the people? The American public has known this since the American defeat in Vietnam. The formerly colonized peoples of the Third World, whose hearts and minds were the ones contested, know it. American officialdom knows it. (In a recent *New Yorker* profile by George Packer of Richard Holbrooke, Obama's envoy to the so-called Af-Pak region, Leslie Gelb, who worked in the Pentagon in the 1960s, recalled, "Changing hearts and minds—all the smart young men thought that.") Today, even the general in charge in Afghanistan, Stanley McChrystal, now asking for 40,000 or more troops, knows it. He can read all about it in the new Army counterinsurgency manual produced by his boss, Centcom commander Gen. David Petraeus. There he can learn that "political factors have primacy in COIN [counterinsurgency]" and that "arguably, the decisive battle is for the people's minds."

But if one has repeated this point anyway (as I have, by a backdoor route), then one must go on to make the rather newer point that there is no political solution that serves the foreign invader either. The problem is structural and fundamental. Like the imperial powers of the past, the United States wants to impose its will on other countries. Yet it is different from those previous powers in at least one respect: it does not aim to rule the countries it invades indefinitely. Conscious that the American public will not support war without end, it means to leave one day. Therefore the art of victory has to be to try to set up a government that can both survive US withdrawal and serve US interests. The circle to be squared is getting the people of a whole country to want what Washington wants. The trouble is that, left to their own devices, other peoples are likely to want what *they* want, not what we want.

One problem flowing from this dilemma is that the more the United States does to set up such a government, the more the "Afghans themselves" (or the Vietnamese themselves or the Iraqis themselves or the whoevers themselves) are tainted by the association. If the paradox of military engagement in such a conflict is that the more you fight the more you lose, then the paradox of political engagement is that the more you rule the weaker the native component of the government becomes, and the more likely it is to collapse when you leave, as the South Vietnamese government did in 1975. That is scarcely a new point, either. For instance, as far back as 1964, Senator Richard Russell said in a phone conversation with President Lyndon Johnson, "It appears that our position is deteriorating, and it looks like the more we try to do for them, the less they're willing to do for themselves." (Holbrooke reprised the point to Packer when he commented on the Afghan government, "The more help they need, the more dependent they get.... In Vietnam, that's exactly what happened.")

The problem of the missing government is no detail of policy; it is fatal to the whole enterprise. And the absence is even more acute in Afghanistan today than it was in Vietnam. Johnson's defense secretary, Robert McNamara, pointed out in 1965 that the government of South Vietnam was a "non-government." And the same year Under Secretary of State George Ball, an in-house dissenter, wrote, "The 'government' in Saigon is a travesty. In a very real sense, South Vietnam is a country with an army and no government." The difference in Afghanistan in 2009? No army, either. (That's why one difficulty that plagued Vietnam, repeated coups d'état, is one problem the United States does not have in Afghanistan.) After touring the Garmsir District in Afghanistan recently, *New York Times* reporter Dexter Filkins wrote, "In Garmsir, there is nothing remotely resembling a modern state that could take over if America and its NATO allies left." In January a Defense Department report stated, "building a fully competent and independent Afghan government will be a lengthy process that will last, at a minimum, decades." Yet without such a government, US policy in Afghanistan is not merely destined to fail; it is incoherent. In a sense, it is not a policy at all. There is a lot in Afghanistan that is different from Vietnam, but this much is the same or worse.

Why, when so much was learned at such cost in Vietnam, is it necessary to learn it all again, through additional bitter and futile experience? The story of the deliberations in the mid-'60s leading to the decision to fight in strength in Vietnam can help us to understand. Anyone who lived through that period and examines the record that has been made available since then has to be astonished by how much the policy-makers knew and understood about the reality of the situation even as they made their ruinous decisions. In 1965 and 1966, on the eve of the great

Jonathan Schell, the Doris Shaffer Fellow at The Nation Institute, is the author, most recently, of The Seventh Decade: The New Shape of Nuclear Danger.

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public protests of 1967 and 1968, antiwar commentators such as Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, I.F. Stone, Mary McCarthy and Walter Lippmann defied the conventional wisdom emanating from the government. They articulated the realities reiterated above, as well as others. It took acuity and intellectual courage to do so. It seemed at the time that they were telling officialdom, which denied all this in public, things it did not know. And yet as we can see now, little of it was a surprise to the policy-makers. In their private deliberations, they acknowledged these things. Here, for example, is Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, one of the architects of the policy, in a memo from October 1964 listing the problems facing the United States:

> A bad colonial heritage of long standing, totally inadequate preparation for self-government by the colonial power, a colonialist war fought in half-baked fashion and lost, a nationalist movement taken over by Communism ruling in the other half of an ethnically and historically united country, the Communist side inheriting much the better military force and far more than its share of the talent—these are the facts that dog us today.

Kai Bird, from whose book *The Color of Truth* this passage is quoted, comments, "In this one long-winded sentence Bundy managed to touch just about all the points I.F. Stone, Bernard Fall or other early critics of the war would make within a year."

Bundy's brother McGeorge, who was national security adviser to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, was scarcely more hopeful. A believer in the doctrine of credibility, which held that a defeat anywhere in the world for American power would be a devastating and unacceptable defeat for it everywhere, he conceded that the US effort in Vietnam might fail but perversely argued that even an unsuccessful war would "damp down the charge that we did not do all that we could have done," for "this charge will be important in many countries, including our own." Thus to fight and fail was better for credibility—and for winning elections—than not to fight at all. Also available, in June 1964, was a definitive memo by intelligence analyst Sherman Kent debunking the principal rationale for the war, the domino theory (a close cousin of the doctrine of credibility), which held that if South Vietnam fell under the control of the North, noncommunist countries throughout Asia and even elsewhere would fall to communism.

Especially striking is the state of mind of Lyndon Johnson, whose secret belief, so sharply at variance with his public assurances, was that the cause was all but hopeless. In the taped conversations with Senator Russell in May 1964, a year before Johnson embarked on his buildup of combat troops, Russell describes the war as "the damn worst mess I ever saw," and Johnson murmurs agreement. Russell tells the president that if it were up to him he would "get out" rather than expand the war. Johnson asks Russell, "How important is it to us?" Russell answers, "It isn't important a damn bit," and Johnson gloomily says of sending in combat troops, "I just haven't got the nerve to do it, and I don't see any other way out of it." These nearly despairing comments are not those of a man filled with a false optimism about the course he is about to embark on.

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We are accustomed to thinking that hard experience in Vietnam taught certain lessons that then, for a while, became cautionary principles. But this record reveals that most of those lessons were known—though not publicly admitted—*before* the big Vietnam escalation. The difference is important. If the disaster was launched in full awareness of the "lessons," then we shouldn't expect that relearning those lessons will be potent in stopping a similar disaster now. If they didn't prevent the disaster the first time, why should they the second or third time? Some other lessons seem to be needed. Why, we therefore need to ask, did Johnson and his advisers steer the country into a war that even to them was looking more and more like a lost cause, or at best a desperate gamble?

In Bird's book and in a more recent one—*Lessons in Disaster* by Gordon Goldstein, who helped McGeorge Bundy to prepare a book reconsidering the war—another factor moves into the foreground. Bundy's death prevented completion of that book, but Goldstein makes use of Bundy's notes in his own book. Seeking to understand the origins of the war, Bundy was impressed with the salience of domestic politics. In 1949 the Communist Party had come to power in China, and ever since, Republicans and other right-wingers had been accusing Democrats of "losing" China. The belief that the United States could have prevented the communist victory was a fantasy; yet the charge became one of the principal themes of Senator Joe McCarthy's attacks on Democrats, which sent currents of fear far beyond the government and into society at large, intimidating and paralyzing a generation. The dread of being accused of lacking patriotic toughness—and above all of being accused of losing a military venture—cast a long shadow. Even Kennedy, who according to Goldstein showed remarkable independence in refusing the nearly unanimous advice from his advisers to send large numbers of combat troops to Vietnam, expressed his fear of being called a "communist appeaser." As he said to his aide Kenny O'Donnell in early 1963, "If I tried to pull out completely now from Vietnam, we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands, but I can do it after I'm re-elected." That re-election, of course, never came.

Johnson was more deeply frightened by the right. Urged by Senator Mike Mansfield to withdraw from Vietnam, he answered that he didn't want another "China in Vietnam." Bundy fueled Johnson's fears. In a 1964 memo he wrote that "the political damage to Truman and Acheson from the fall of China arose because most Americans came to believe that we could and should have done more than we did to prevent it. This is exactly what would happen now if we should seem to be the first to quit in Saigon." In another memo, Bundy outlined a moderated version of the domino theory and went on to argue that neutrality would be viewed by "all anti-communist Vietnamese" as a "betrayal," thus angering a domestic constituency powerful enough "to lose us an election."

Did Bundy and Johnson's other advisers push the country into a disastrous war in order to win an election—or, to be more exact, to avoid losing one? Motivations are never easy to sort out. On the one hand, Johnson, Bundy and the others surely gave sincere credence to the domino/credibility theory, just as Obama probably believes that the war in Afghanistan is "necessary," in his words, "for the defense of our people." (Unfortunately, impossible missions do not become possible because they have been dubbed necessary; on the contrary, they become quagmires.) On the other hand, that theory also meshed with suspicious ease with the perceived domestic political need, always on the president's mind, to appear tough to the domestic audience—to do everything he could to avoid appearing "less of a hawk than your more respectable opponents," in Bundy's retrospective words. After thinking the matter over for thirty years, Bundy would declare the domestic considerations uppermost. In his words describing Johnson's frame of mind at the time, "LBJ is not deeply concerned about who governs Laos, or who governs South Vietnam—he's deeply concerned with what the average American voter is going to think about how he did in the ball game of the Cold War. The great Cold War championship gets played in the largest stadium in the United States and he, Lyndon Johnson, is the quarterback, and if he loses, how does he do in the next election? So don't lose. Now that's too simple, but it's where he is. He's living with his own political survival every time he looks at these questions."

What is uncanny about the current debate on Afghanistan is the degree to which it displays continuity with the Vietnam debate.

Former Defense Secretary McNamara agreed. Johnson, he said in an interview with Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post* in 2007, "didn't want to listen" to McNamara's growing doubts about the war. Why? Domestic politics: he was "more afraid of the right than the left. And he was afraid that if he did anything to in any way appear to appease the North Vietnamese, he would be severely criticized by the right wing of American politics. Therefore he didn't do it." Johnson later confided the same. To his biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin he said, "I knew that Harry Truman and Dean Acheson had lost their effectiveness from the day that the communists took over in China. I believed that the loss of China had played a large role in the rise of Joe McCarthy. And I knew that all these problems, taken together, were chickenshit compared to what might happen if we lost Vietnam." Or, as Bundy put it to Goldstein in words that could serve as an epitaph for the era, "For LBJ the domino theory was really a matter of domestic politics."

Are these events too distant from the present to be relevant to Obama's deliberations regarding Afghanistan? On the contrary, what is uncanny about the current debate is precisely the degree to which it displays continuity with the Vietnam debate. The Obama administration knows it. A few months before he became special envoy, Holbrooke, who was an official in Vietnam in the mid-'60s, favorably reviewed the Goldstein book in the *Times*, praising it for offering

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"insight into how Bundy, a man of surpassing skill and reputation, could have advised two presidents so badly." We can imagine that Holbrooke would not like this to be said of him a few decades from now. Peter Spiegel and Jonathan Weisman of the *Wall Street Journal* have revealed that the Goldstein book has become required reading at the White House. Lessons of Vietnam are flowing through other channels as well. Petraeus's counterinsurgency manual, with all its talk of winning hearts and minds, is pure Vietnam. To most Americans, Vietnam taught one big lesson: "Don't do it again!" To today's military, Vietnam has taught a host of little lessons, adding up to "Do it better!" The military has in effect militarized the arguments of the peace movement of the 1960s. Are the hearts and minds of the local people arrayed against the United States? Then be nice to them. (In a *Washington Post* column supporting a troop increase in Afghanistan, David Ignatius cited the fact that US troops are issued petty cash to buy Afghans soda and other goodies.) Are civilian casualties discrediting the American effort? Cut them to a minimum, as General McChrystal is seeking to do (with mixed success). Is corruption in the client government rampant? "Pressure" it to be honest.

Along the political track, the lessons of the past have also been transmitted down to the present. The experience of Senator George McGovern, the 1972 Democratic presidential candidate, was decisive. He proposed to end the war, which by then was unpopular with the public, yet lost the election in a landslide. The defeat seemed to confirm the fears that had haunted Johnson: those who oppose or lose wars lose elections. That lesson instilled in the Democratic Party a bone-deep fear of "McGovernism," which has continued to this day.

And so, hanging over the scene, still, are the political pressures that go back almost fifty years, to Vietnam, or even sixty years, to the myth that the United States lost China. There is an unmistakable continuity that runs from McCarthy's attacks on Truman and his administration for "appeasement" and even "treason" clear down to Dick Cheney's and Karl Rove's and Glenn Beck's refrains assailing Obama for opposing the Iraq War, not to speak of Sarah Palin's charge during the election that he had been "palling around with terrorists." (The Republicans even call Obama a "socialist," as if the cold war had never ended.) We have no internal records of the administration's decision-making, nor of course any thirty-or-forty-years-later rethinking and bean-spilling, so we cannot know how much domestic factors weigh in the deliberations. It might be hard to tell even if we did possess these. Yet it is no secret that Obama's support for the war in Afghanistan served as protection against charges of weakness over his policy of withdrawing from Iraq. (We might go as far as to say that in having a second war to support while opposing the war in Iraq, Obama had a political opportunity never available to Johnson, all of whose eggs were in the Vietnam basket.) In the words of foreign policy old hand Morton Abramowitz to Packer, "Obama…to show he was tough, made Afghanistan his signature issue because he wanted to get out of Iraq."

In short, in strictly political terms, the Vietnam dilemma has been handed down to Obama virtually intact. Now as then, the issue politically is whether the United States is able to fail in a

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VILLAGE INDUSTRY IN INDONESIA
S. Ann Dunham

Edited and with a preface by
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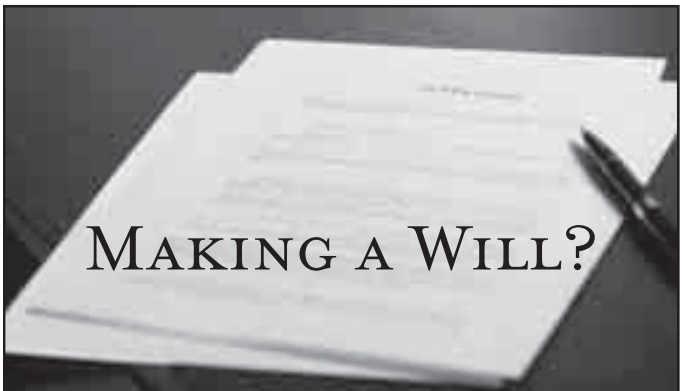

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war without coming unhinged. Does the American body politic have a reverse gear? Does it know how to cut losses? Is it capable of learning from experience? Or must it plunge unchecked over every cliff it approaches? And at the heart of these questions is another: must liberals and moderates always bow down before the crazy right when it comes to war and peace? Must presidents behave like Johnson, of whom his attorney general, Nicholas Katzenbach, later said, "It would not have made any difference what anybody advised him—he would have done what he did [in Vietnam]…. It was fear of the right wing." What is the source of this raw power, this right-wing veto over presidents, Congresses and public opinion? The person who can answer these questions will have discovered one of the keys to a half-century of American history—and the forces that, even now, bear down on Obama as he considers what to do in Afghanistan.

Recently Obama paid a night visit to Dover Air Force Base to view the homecoming of the remains of soldiers killed in Afghanistan. The event, as these returns always are, was minutely choreographed, every step and gesture planned in advance, as if molded and slowed by the pressure of death. Obama saluted in slow motion, in unison with four uniformed soldiers, then walked in step with them past the van that had just received the remains from a cargo plane that had brought them home. No one spoke. On the one hand, it seemed that Obama might have been absorbed more deeply into the military, to have been caught in its somber spell. On the other hand, his presence seemed a silent public vow, as he makes his decisions, to keep his mind fixed on matters of life and death, not on the next election. His actions in the weeks and years ahead will tell which it was. ■

The Money Man's Best Friend

Blue Dog Democrats are undermining prospects for financial-industry regulation and reform.

by WILLIAM GREIDER

The Obama administration promised to reform the financial system and make it safe for the rest of us, but recent Congressional action is more likely to reset the fuse for another explosive calamity. The time bomb in this case is that arcane financial instrument known as derivatives—the hedging devices that the big banks sell to investors, corporations and other banks to reduce risk or evade the requirements to hold adequate capital on their books.

CHRISTOPHER SERRA

As the financial meltdown demonstrated, derivatives do not reduce risk. They amplify it and spread it around interlocking networks of unwitting investors. That house of cards collapsed worldwide a year ago. It would be tragic to let the bankers build a new one. Some reformers think all but the simplest, most visible forms of derivatives should be prohibited by law. The president prefers instead to regulate them. Derivatives, his advisers explained, would be less dangerous if they were traded openly in financial markets, just like stocks and bonds. Regulators could then put the brakes on dangerous excess if they saw it developing. Anyway, that was the theory.

But the "reform" legislation approved by the House Financial Services Committee on October 15 is a fiesta of exemptions, exceptions and twisted legalese that effectively defeat the original purpose. Only experts can divine the actual meaning of the bill's densely worded provisions, and many of them have reacted with disgust. The "entanglements of derivatives exposures" among oversize banks "is the equivalent of the San Andreas Fault of our financial system," veteran financier Robert Johnson testified at an October 7 hearing on the draft bill. If Congress does not disarm derivatives, he warned, it could lead to another cascade of failure that would give regulators no choice but once again to rush to the rescue of the banks dubbed "too big to fail."

That risk is not theoretical. The largest banks that dominate this lucrative business seem to have gotten pretty much what they wanted—a free hand to keep peddling the indecipherable derivatives beyond the reach of regulators. According to the *Financial Times*, Goldman Sachs plans to market a new financial instrument that will allow banks to reduce the capital required to hold risky assets on their balance sheets. Goldman calls this product "insurance" and expects to sell it to the banks with toxic portfolios, enabling them to shift the risk off their balance sheets. It is not clear whether the new bill will interfere with this "innovation." Goldman evidently does not see a problem.

Who drafted this dubious piece of legislation? Bankers (or their lawyers) did. The leading sellers of derivatives are an exclusive club of five very large financial institutions—Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs—that hold 95 percent of the derivatives exposure among the largest banks (the total contract value exceeds $290 trillion). These are the same folks who toppled the global economy and compelled government to intervene with gigantic bailouts.

Michael Greenberger, a University of Maryland law professor and veteran federal regulator, studied the House committee's 187-page bill and detected the fine needlework of Wall Street lawyers. "It had to be written by someone inside the banks," Greenberger said, "because buried every few pages is a tricky and devilish 'exception.' It would greatly surprise me if these poison pills originated from anyone on Capitol Hill or the Treasury."

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A well-informed Congressional source confirmed that the original language in the draft legislation was written by financial-industry experts. It "was probably written by JPMorgan and Goldman Sachs," he told me, "and possibly the Chicago Mercantile Exchange." The Chicago exchange trades commodity futures—hog bellies, beef, grains—and more exotic derivatives. It is a rival to Wall Street but very close to agribusiness interests like Cargill, the giant grain trader, that make heavy use of derivatives.

Washington insiders may not be shocked to learn that private-interest groups provided the draft bill. This is what lobbyists often do for the legislative process, especially on complex subjects like taxation and regulatory law. But the legislation was delivered to the House Financial Services Committee by Blue Dog Democrats, not lobbyists. There are fifteen Blue Dogs and like-minded members on the committee. Together they make up more than one-third of the committee's Democratic majority (forty-two Democrats, twenty-nine Republicans).

"The conduit for the draft text was Blue Dogs and conservative Democrats," my source explained. "The committee could not do anything without them," since the Republicans were committed to voting against whatever the Democrats proposed. Chairman Barney Frank made a deal to accept the Blue Dogs' original draft as the starting point, hoping to improve on it with amendments. The chairman made progress, but the finished bill is still vulnerable to whatever evasive games Wall Street decides to play.

The Blue Dogs claimed they were speaking for business, not bankers, but this too involved a little sleight of hand by industry lobbyists. Last summer, an official of the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association told colleagues at a private industry meeting that since the bankers have damaged credibility in Washington, they should send their customers to push the bankers' position on Capitol Hill. Sure enough, representatives from various industrial and agricultural sectors showed up to testify as expert witnesses and demand exemption from regulation as the "end users" of derivatives. Bankers told their clients that regulation would raise their costs. Never mind the costs to the country if derivatives blow up again.

The ploy seems to have worked. The exemption for "end users" contained in the committee's final legislation is a major loophole—so vaguely defined it exempts insurance and mutual funds and might even be construed to protect hedge funds and private-equity capital from the disclosure of trading derivatives on public exchanges. Some committee members know very well they failed to eliminate crucial exceptions. Frank's commitment to reform is in question, since he voted for the original deregulation of derivatives in 2000. Now he says he wants to offer strengthening amendments when the bill comes to the House floor for passage. He has asked regulators at the SEC and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission to recommend ways to close loopholes "to prevent speculators from masquerading as end-users."

The odor of money hovers over the Blue Dogs—political money for their next campaigns. The House Financial Services Committee is a prized assignment and known informally among members as a "money committee," not because it deals with money issues but because its members have an easier time raising campaign funds from the banks and financial firms under their jurisdiction. This is not illegal. It is the way Congress works.

Money also explains why the committee is top-heavy with Blue Dogs. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi put them there, along with other freshmen and sophomores, knowing it can help them win re-election. She was encouraged by Representative Rahm Emanuel, now White House chief of staff, who was then chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. In 2006 and again in 2008, Emanuel had a lot to do with electing Blue Dogs to House seats the Democratic Party was not supposed to win—suburban and rural districts normally represented by Republicans. Emanuel recruited candidates, coached them and financed them. They helped Democrats win control of the House and helped Pelosi become Speaker. Many of them face tough re-election fights in 2010 and need to raise a lot of money to survive. Naturally, party leaders worry about keeping them.

These more conservative junior members, one might say, are the tail wagging the committee's older, more liberal dogs. The Democratic Party is stuck with the consequences. It is a reform party that wants to have it both ways—serving the public interest without overly discomforting the bankers. The dilemma poses a test for Pelosi: will she stand with her favored Blue Dogs or go with the progressive/liberal majority of Democrats who want to solve the problem?

The Democrats face a dilemma: can they serve the public interest without discomforting the bankers who help fund their campaigns?

The House legislation essentially reflects the strategic choice President Obama made about financial reform. He wants to rearrange the regulatory system in Washington, but he does not want to alter the fundamental structure of the financial system or prohibit banking practices known to be dangerous. Instead of proposing hard rules and specific limits on bankers, the president would empower the regulatory agencies to keep watch and put the Federal Reserve in charge of guarding against systemic risk. Advocates of this approach argue that lawmakers do not know enough to write legislative commandments. There is some truth to that, but why imagine that regulators know what to do? Or that they will have the nerve to impose tougher rules that Congress declines to enact?

The Fed, in particular, failed utterly to see the developing crisis in advance or to listen to warnings from those who did. Again and again during the last twenty-five years, the Federal Reserve worried privately about banking excesses but never stepped up to restrain the reckless behavior until it was too late. Then, in crisis, the central bank rushed to the rescue and bailed out the largest of the bad actors.

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But skepticism is rapidly gaining momentum in Congress. The most noteworthy critics of Obama's relatively limp reforms are two former Federal Reserve chairmen—Paul Volcker and Alan Greenspan—who in different ways recommend far stronger actions to correct things. Volcker wants to peel back a generation of permissive deregulation and restore the traditional format in banking: prevent commercial banks, whose deposits are insured by the government, from taking risky adventures in financial markets. Do not give more responsibility to the Fed, so it can focus on its core function—the conduct of monetary policy.

Greenspan now calls for anti-trust enforcement to break up the mega-banks—the very behemoths he helped create as Fed chairman. "If they're too big to fail, they're too big," he told the Council on Foreign Relations on October 15. "In 1911, we broke up Standard Oil. So what happened? The individual parts became more valuable than the whole. Maybe that's what we need to do." These declarations may read as belated expressions of regret, but they have serious influence in Washington.

In the Senate, both the chairman of the Banking Committee, Christopher Dodd, and the ranking Republican, Richard Shelby, think putting the Federal Reserve in charge of regulators would be a mistake. On November 10 Dodd unveiled a draft bill that strips the central bank of its regulatory function and creates a new overarching regulatory administration that pre-empts existing agencies. Shelby argues further that the Fed should be reorganized to eliminate the role of private bankers in making internal decisions at the twelve regional Federal Reserve banks (Dodd would require Senate confirmation for presidents of those banks). "I believe this is an inherent conflict," Shelby said, "because the banks decide who will be their regulator. I don't think that's a healthy thing." Senator Bernie Sanders, always the point man for big ideas, proposes that the Treasury be required to identify and dismantle banks that are too big to fail.

Amid the usual cast of characters, a strong new voice showed up this season to advise Congress—Richard Trumka, the new president of the AFL-CIO. "Our members were not invited to Wall Street's party," Trumka told the House Financial Services Committee, "but we have paid for it with devastated pension funds, lost jobs and public bailouts of private-sector losses. Our goal is a financial system that is…the servant of the real economy rather than its master."

Trumka too objects to Obama's plan to put the Federal Reserve in charge as super-regulator—at least until the central bank is reformed, stripped of banking insiders and made democratically accountable. "Giving the Federal Reserve, with its current governance, control over which financial institutions are bailed out in a crisis is effectively giving the banks the ability to raid the Treasury for their own benefit," he warned.

Strong words, but Trumka's critique is a better fit with reality and the public's angry mood than anything heard from the White House or Congress. As recent election returns suggest, if the president continues to soft-sell reform, he is at risk of being identified with the old order in Wall Street. The longer Congress tries to placate the bankers with meek reforms, the sooner Democrats will discover this is really dumb politics. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

Palestinian neighbors and treat them with respect" and was virtually blacklisted by my Jewish musical colleagues. (Isaac Stern was sympathetic, but even he couldn't buck the tide.)

JOSEPH EGER, *conductor/music director*
Symphony for United Nations

Israel on Our Mind

BERKELEY, CALIF.

Re "American Jews Rethink Israel" [Adam Horowitz and Philip Weiss, Nov. 2]: I am a young practicing Ashkenazi Jew who has been "rethinking" Israel for years. I support the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, which goes beyond questioning the massacres Israel regularly engages in to lay bare the truth: that like all colonial settler states, the existence of Israel is based on stealing the land, water, self-determination and other vital resources of Palestinians and crushing resistance through apartheid, displacement, militarization, policing and other state violence. It is also based on immense military and diplomatic support from the United States because of our oil interests in the region.

The idea of Israel is fundamentally flawed, because: (1) Zionism is inherently racist, and (2) the safety of Jews, or any group, can never be based on compromising and denying the safety of others. I support the right of return for all Palestinians, the right of Israeli Jews to stay and a redistribution of power, land and wealth in the new state.

STACIE SZMONKO

NEW BRITAIN, CONN.

I can appreciate that people on the left want to hold Israel to a reasonable standard with respect to disproportionate use of force. I can further appreciate that Israel, because it feels itself to be under siege, has developed a kind of siege mentality, and that what comes with a siege mentality is often a willingness to overlook common standards about the disproportionate use of force. Israel ought to be held accountable for the disproportionate use of force, like any other country.

But this article is one of many on this subject that I routinely tune out. You want to know why? Because nowhere do the identified "American Jews" who are "increasingly critical of Israel" state unambiguously that they differ from other critics of Israel in that they actually believe in the concept of human rights.

If you want someone like me to tune back in, all you need is a paragraph saying, "Of course, the UN Human Rights Commission is a ludicrous grouping of major world offenders against the concept of human rights, and whatever they have to say about Israel is going to be biased by their hostile worldview—but here are some things that are true about Israel's behavior in Lebanon, the Gaza war, etc., despite the fact that Israel's opponents are not even remotely credible defenders of human rights."

It might help if you also dropped in a couple of lines about how "Hamas wants to bring back the Caliphate and treat Jews in the Middle East as *dhimmis* rather than equal citizens."

Failing that, I've got my hand on the tuning dial.

ZACHARY KLAAS

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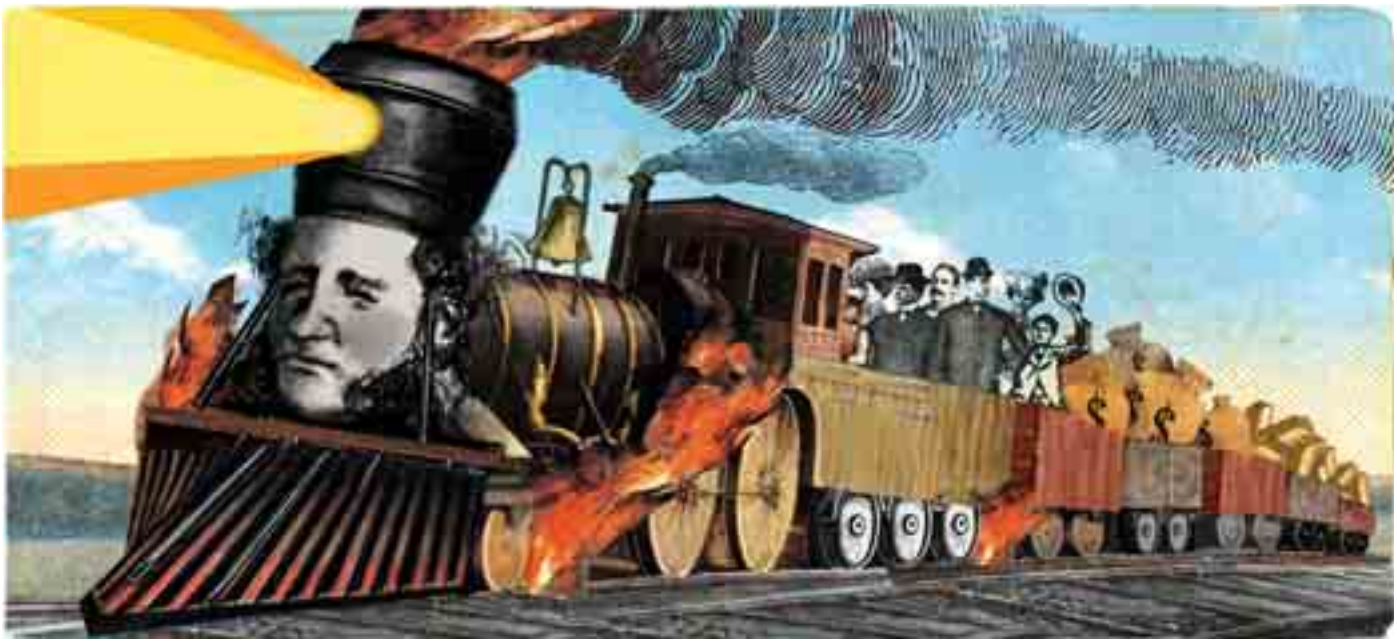

DOUG CHAYKA

The Misunderstood Robber Baron

by STEVE FRASER

Cornelius Vanderbilt died in January 1877. Six months later, the greatest social insurrection of the nineteenth century paralyzed the operations of Vanderbilt's New York Central Railroad (by then overseen by his son William) along with the other three trunk lines connecting the East Coast to Chicago and points farther west. The Great Railroad Strike, as it came to be known, was an upheaval of extraordinary violence sparked by an astonishing act of collusion and callousness: a 10 percent wage cut announced the previous year—amid the century's worst depression—and endorsed in concert by the four trunk lines. Armed confrontations between state militias and infuriated railroad workers and their legions of sympathizers broke out in cities and towns across the country. A general strike paralyzed St. Louis. On a single day in Pittsburgh, crowds burned thirty-nine railroad buildings and 1,300 railroad cars and engines as well as a huge grain elevator; armed with Gatling guns, the National Guard killed twenty that night and more the next day. Thomas Scott, who ran the Pennsylvania Railroad, concluded, "Nothing but the insanity of passion, played upon by designing and mischievous leaders, can explain the destruction of vast quantities of railroad equipment." Nothing, that is, except the desperate circumstances of the railroad workers—who for paltry wages risked being killed or maimed in industrial accidents—and their families.

The three weeks of mayhem ended with widespread applause for the forces of law and order. Armories were erected in major cities to quell the anxieties of the middle classes, who since the incendiary days of the Paris Commune had lived in chronic fear of a bloody class confrontation erupting in America. In this tense climate, many came to revere the new lords of industry. A few years after his death, Vanderbilt was lionized by his first biographer: without "the Commodore"—a sobriquet by which Vanderbilt was widely known at the time—there'd be "no railroads or steamships or telegraphs; no cities, no leisure class, no schools, no colleges, literature, art; in short no civilization." Millions shared in this idolatry.

A minority were irate and excoriated the titans of finance and industry as "robber barons" and worse. E.L. Godkin, founder of *The Nation*, launched a volley of invective at the new plutocracy: "kings of the street"

The First Tycoon
by T.J. Stiles.
Knopf. 719 pp. $37.50.

like Vanderbilt displayed "unmitigated and immitigable selfishness" as appalling as their "audacity, push, unscrupulousness and brazen disregard of others' rights." Henry Adams, writing about the Credit Mobilier debacle after the Civil War, in which railroad operators connived with government officials to loot the public treasury, concluded that "the moral law has expired—like the Constitution." This less sanguine view grew more popular in the twentieth century, especially during and after the Great Depression, a catastrophe millions of Americans blamed on a second generation of "robber barons." Historical scholarship reflected that assessment. Biographies of Mellon, Carnegie and Rockefeller were often laced with moral censure, warning that "tories of industry" were a threat to democracy and that parasitism, aristocratic pretension and tyranny have always trailed in the wake of concentrated wealth, whether accumulated dynastically or more impersonally by the faceless corporation. This scholarship, and the cultural persuasion of which it was an expression, drew on a deeply rooted sensibility—partly reli-

Steve Fraser, a visiting professor at Columbia University, is working on a book about America's two Gilded Ages.

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gious, partly egalitarian and democratic—that stretched back to William Jennings Bryan, Andrew Jackson and Tom Paine.

The censure of big business continued through the 1960s and beyond, but it has gradually been eclipsed by the cultural and intellectual reclamation of Gilded Age tycoonery. During the past two decades, revisionist biographies and collective portraits of Mellon, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Harriman, J.P. Morgan and others have effectively rehabilitated the reputation of the robber baron. Even the railroad tycoon and speculator Jay Gould, known to his contemporaries as "the Mephistopheles of Wall Street," has been rescued from cultural purgatory. The quotient of negative moral and political judgment in these studies has declined or disappeared entirely. The emphasis now falls on the commercial brilliance of these men, their implacable will to succeed, their pioneering roles in strengthening the country's industrial and financial resources, and their mastery of the increasingly complex technological, financial and organizational innovations that have defined the modern economy.

Cornelius Vanderbilt saw that laissez-faire could be a defense of and an attack on wealth.

Together this literature might be said to constitute a new genre: the misunderstood robber baron. The genre does not slight the harsh circumstances and nasty tactics that may have facilitated a robber baron's rise to dominance: a no-holds-barred competitive ferociousness, a casual attitude about sticking to the letter of the law, an imperiousness that distanced him from the plight of those less fortunate, a ruthless drive to bankrupt competitors, the suborning of elected officials. But instead of criticizing these traits and tactics, the genre naturalizes them. If these men did things that today might strike us as unscrupulous, so too did their contemporaries, all members of a society motivated by the single-minded individualism characteristic of a robust free-market economy. Looked at from afar, what we are persuaded to see through the examination of these lives is the incubation of the modern world of industrial and financial capitalism and its ineluctable evolutionary mechanics, not always pretty but at the end of the day a blessing that endowed the country with wealth and power. This sunny picture mirrors today's ownership society, with its free-market audaciousness and its reverence of businessmen in general, especially those committed to "lean and mean" competitiveness and financial empire-building. Arguably, the genre of the misunderstood robber baron is itself an expression of the shift in the zeitgeist, just as that earlier literature of moral condemnation shared in a more universal set of reservations about the reign of big business.

A telling undercurrent runs through many of these biographies. They seem haunted by the first wave of robber baron biographies and feel the need to exorcise their heavy admixture of judgmental criticism. They often do so by adopting a standpoint of Olympian disinterest. With a certain cool condescension they dismiss the spirit of anti-capitalism as near-sighted or doctrinaire and fatally out of touch with the inexorable logic of economic development. They imply that earlier critics—everyone from Henry Adams, Henry George and Henry Demarest Lloyd in the nineteenth century to Charles Beard and other historians of the Progressive era and continuing on in the work of Matthew Josephson, Ferdinand Lundberg and the New Left historians of the '60s—were captives of a grand illusion: that feasible alternatives to capitalism existed, a menu of possibilities ranging from the cooperative commonwealth to socialism. Historians of the misunderstood robber baron are free of that illusion; indeed, their freedom carries with it the conviction that for all its obvious failings the free-market system prevails because it works, and it works because it is in harmony with some deeper economic truth as lawful as a chemical reaction.

Whatever their *Weltanschauung*, many of these studies are first-rate histories, and *The First Tycoon*, a new biography of Cornelius Vanderbilt by T.J. Stiles, is no exception. Vanderbilt's rise from small-time ferry boat operator on Staten Island to the dominant figure in the nation's maritime (steamboat) and land (railroad) transportation system is a fascinating story, and Stiles tells it well. His writing is lively and colorful. He is a meticulous and exhaustive researcher with an instinct for the telling anecdote. Drawing on the observations of local merchants, visitors from abroad and the *aperçus* of Herman Melville, Stiles artfully evokes the hurly-burly of early nineteenth-century New York City: the malodors of its wharves; the logjam of sailing ships and steamboats crowding its harbor; the frenzy of commercial wheeling and dealing in the serpentine streets of Lower Manhattan, which soon established the city as the headquarters of the nation's commercial maritime economy. Vanderbilt made his fortune in this mercantile jungle, and Stiles does a superb job of portraying how it shaped his character—hardening its armature, sharpening his guile. And though "the First Tycoon" was often a clumsy and reluctant writer who didn't leave behind much of a paper trail, Stiles has some convincing insights into Vanderbilt's inner life.

Stiles's account of the California gold rush of 1849 teems with vivid descriptions of prospectors, con men, gamblers and dealmakers, and captures the meteoric emergence of San Francisco, with its uninhibited night life and the extraordinary cultural diversity that drew fortune-seekers from all over the world. The discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill presented the opportunity for Vanderbilt to transform his Atlantic Coast steamboat business into a transoceanic one, transporting passengers west to the gold fields and, more important, carrying gold back east to New York's banks. The gold rush also entangled the Commodore in endless intrigues to construct a land route (railroad/canal/steamboat) across Nicaragua connecting the two oceans, so as to speed up and lower the cost of transit to and from the gold coast. Stiles is especially good, although a bit long-winded, at describing the dangerous yet tragicomic players involved in these machinations, among them the Southern filibusters, freelance military adventurers and political self-promoters who aimed to overthrow local Central American governments and annex places like Nicaragua to the South, feeding Dixie's insatiable appetite for new slave territories.

Stiles's talents are by no means limited to his descriptive powers. His analysis of the political economy of the antebellum North is often compelling. He calls Vanderbilt a "shopkeeper of the sea," a wonderful metaphor that conveys the distinctly mercantile character of the American economy in the decades leading up to the Civil War. It was an economy that rested on trade, not manufacturing, and the Commodore mastered it because he managed to control much of its motorized transport: first the steamboat coastal and then transatlantic trade, and later the land commerce carried by steam-driven railroads. Vanderbilt made his fortune and acquired power in this earlier, commercial phase of American development, not during the subsequent industrialization that made his fellow robber barons so rich and famous.

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When Vanderbilt became a steamboat operator in 1817, the mercantile economy was controlled by an elite circle of Anglo-Dutch bankers and merchants dominant since the pre-Revolutionary era. Its members enjoyed a privileged position, in particular an entitlement to exclusive corporate charters issued by state and local governments to carry on various businesses: steamboat lines, turnpikes, railroads, canals and other facets of infrastructure vital to a trading society. The democracy for which the Jacksonian era is so well-known was marked by the desire to open up this state-supported, insular mercantile economy to every man. Antebellum America boiled with entrepreneurial energies; go-getters roamed the land eager to take advantage of the flood of business opportunities that accompanied the country's territorial expansion. Aspiring men on the make denounced established ones, especially those enjoying the favors of the government, as monopolists and aristocrats. They sought a truly free market economy, universal incorporation laws and the end of state-sanctioned monopolies. It was a war against one form of capitalism on behalf of another.

Stiles makes a persuasive case that Vanderbilt was an important figure in the struggle to unseat an older, patrician form of capitalism. Although he was apolitical, neither a Whig nor a Democrat, and involved himself in politics only when it suited his immediate business objectives, Vanderbilt was in many ways the perfect Jacksonian. Again and again he challenged the state-sanctioned franchises run by politically connected grandees in New York and New England. He established rival steamboat lines, using his detailed knowledge of ship construction and the vagaries of the sea to drive established franchises into bankruptcy. He sank others in court. And he was hardly bashful when it came to deploying democratic rhetoric to discredit his top-drawer enemies while concealing his predatory aims.

The patrician old guard fancied itself a disinterested elite equipped with the breeding, knowledge and independence to act in the public interest; but in fact, as market society extended its reach the old guard behaved like ordinary businessmen, anxious to retain their special commercial advantages. As Stiles cogently observes, "New York's old patrician families had carried on into this more competitive, egalitarian era, carrying their wealth and prejudices with them. Their elitism blended with the Whig faith in an entrepreneurial but orderly economy."

Vanderbilt, on the other hand, might have preached the democratic virtues of the free market, but he was perfectly prepared to impose his own monopoly control when the chance presented itself, or to accept ransom money from his competitors so that they might continue to operate their monopolies. Stiles dubs Vanderbilt the "selfish revolutionary" and the "millionaire radical" because he grasped that laissez-faire ideology could perform double duty as a defense of and an attack on wealth. In August 1834 Vanderbilt published a piece of democratic demagoguery aimed at his patrician rivals in the *New York Evening Post*, a paper committed to radical Jacksonian anti-monopoly politics. His plea was written on behalf of one of his steamboat enterprises, pointedly named the People's Line, running between New York and Albany: "Thus fellow citizens has this aristocratic monopoly, secure as they think themselves in wealth and power, wantonly attacked an individual whose constant endeavor has been to avoid a contest with them…the question now is, will the public countenance the combined companies in an act of overbearing oppression, or will they patronize and encourage one who is determined to resist aggression and injustice.… The North River is the great highway of the people, and does not belong exclusively to the Monopolists."

All this verbiage capitalized on the huckstering riffs of the era's Mammon-worshiping land promoters, town developers and canal and railroad stock jobbers. It's an irresistible blend of the highfalutin democratic egalitarianism and unblinkered covetousness satirized by Charles Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Whether Vanderbilt really believed himself a warrior against monopoly or simply rented the rhetoric by the column inch is very hard to say. What's clear is that he championed capitalism by decrying it. Most important, Stiles notes a deeper irony of the era: that the corporation, which originated as a creature of the state, subject at least in theory to its rules and regulations, would become instead in the decades to follow the master of the state, free of public constraints or any obligation to serve the public interest, thanks to the anti-monopoly social and political upheaval inspired by people like Cornelius Vanderbilt and Andrew Jackson.

For all its virtues, *The First Tycoon* devotes scant attention to the way this broader cultural atmosphere nourished the Napoleonic mythos that came to envelop businessmen like Vanderbilt. The Commodore's modest social origins and rise to powerful heights mimicked those of Napoleon, a man from nowhere who became emperor. That's one version of the American Dream and its promise of limitless opportunity and endless self-invention. It is the reason so many revered Vanderbilt. *Great Fortunes, and How They Were Made*, a classic celebration of self-made American heroes published in 1871, described Vanderbilt's "mind of crystal, the heart of adamant, the hand of steel, and the will of iron." In a more distanced and dispassionate way, Stiles endorses this romantic portrait of the Commodore. Aware that he was hated and resented by many, especially by his defeated business rivals, Stiles nevertheless touts Vanderbilt's reputation as a great man, a rough-hewn economic genius, a primordial tycoon and architect of the modern world.

The endorsement forms the very spine of *The First Tycoon*. The titles of the book's three parts—"Captain," "Commodore" and "King"—convey the image of a triumphant warrior. The titles, in fact, reprise the appellations by which Vanderbilt came to be widely known; but once adopted as organizing themes for a biography, they develop a life of their own. Stiles never seriously questions the extravagant language used by contemporaries to describe Vanderbilt, such as the encomium issued by the directors of his railroad empire upon the Commodore's death. The "splendor" of his "marvelous personal triumphs" lent them "the tinge of romance.… Beginning in a humble position…he rose by his genius, his indomitable energy and his clear forecast.… It was to his lasting honor that his uniform policy was to protect, develop, and improve the interests with which he was connected, instead of seeking a selfish and dishonorable profit." Stiles's own prose is not without grandiose flourishes. His images and metaphors grow overripe as he describes Vanderbilt casting "a shadow over millions of people" and rising "like a mountain peak above the clouds." Throughout he deploys the vocabulary of the Napoleonic empire-builder, the dramaturgy of combat and daredevil heroism. He admires the Commodore's "iron nerve" during the Panic of 1873, how he was in "full command as others nearly broke down in fear," and talks about how alone among the railroad titans Vanderbilt remained "unbent and unbroken."

Taking this approach raises the stakes, pressuring Stiles to make more of less, to puff up the pedestrian, lending it a grandeur it doesn't warrant. One result is that the book bogs down at the midway point as Stiles slogs through one business deal after another in a numbing effort to demonstrate Vanderbilt's superior acumen. Thousands upon thou-

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Arabian Fables (II)

More fanciful Arab myths to sway world opinion.

Earlier this year, we published our message, "Arabian Fables (I)," in which we made clear how the Arab propaganda machine creates myths and lies with which to misinform the world. We discussed the myths of the "Palestinians"and of the "West Bank" and the mythical concept of "occupied territories". In today's message, we shall address three more of these myths.

What are some of these myths?

Jerusalem ("Arab East Jerusalem"). The Arabs have assiduously propagated the myths that Jerusalem is an Arab capital, that (after Mecca and Medina) Jerusalem is their third holy city, and that it is intolerable to them that infidels (Jews) are in possession of it.

The reality of course is that Jerusalem was never an Arab capital and that it was, until the Jews revitalized it, a dusty provincial city that hardly played any economic, social, or political role. Jerusalem is mentioned hundreds of times in the Jewish Bible and has been the center of the Jewish faith and the focus of Jewish longing ever since the Romans destroyed the Temple in the early years of the first millennium. Not once is Jerusalem mentioned in the Koran.

> "The Arab propaganda machine has created myths that have been accepted by much of the world. No peace in the Middle East is possible until those Arab myths have been exposed for what they are!"

As to "East Jerusalem": There is East Saint Louis, there is East Hampton, and there used to be East Berlin, but, until the Arab propaganda machine created the concept, there was never in history an "East Jerusalem", let alone an "Arab East Jerusalem".

The eastern part of Jerusalem is now predominantly inhabited by Arabs, though their proportion is decreasing. But what is the reason for this? It is because the Jordanians destroyed all traces of Jewish presence from the eastern part of the city and drove all the Jews out during the 19 years (between 1948 and 1967) in which they were in occupation of the eastern part of the city. The world, informed by Arab propaganda, considers those Jews who wish to return to the eastern part of the city to be troublemakers or worse.

The concept of Jerusalem being a holy Arab city and the capital of whatever political entity the "Palestinians" may eventually form is a myth and so of course is the concept of "Arab East Jerusalem".

"Settlements." When Jordan came into possession of Judea/Samaria and the eastern part of Jerusalem, following the invasion of the newly-formed Jewish state, and stayed in occupation for 19 years, it systematically obliterated all Jewish villages in the area under their occupation, drove out the Jewish inhabitants, and left the area "judenrein" (free of Jews)—the first time that concept had been applied since the Nazis created it during their short and bloody reign in Germany. When the Israelis recovered these territories, they rebuilt these villages, created new ones, and built new towns and suburbs to existing cities, especially Jerusalem.

The Arabs decided to call these towns and villages "settlements", with their connotation of illegitimacy and impermanence. The world, including the United States, is much agitated over these population centers and, goaded by the Arabs, declares them to be impediments to peace. What nonsense! Nobody considers the tens of thousands of Arabs who continue to stream to these territories as impediments to peace.

The term "settlements", too, is a propaganda myth created by the Arabs.

"Refugees." In 1948, when six Arab armies invaded the Jewish state in order to destroy it on the very day of its birth, broadcasts by the advancing Arab armies appealed to the resident Arabs to leave their homes so as not to be in the way of the invaders. As soon as the "quick victory" was won, they could return to their homes and would also enjoy the loot from the Jews, who would have been driven into the sea. It didn't turn out quite that way. Those Arabs who, despite the urgings of the Jews to stay and to remain calm, foolishly left, became refugees. Those who decided not to yield to those blandishments are now, and have been for over 60 years, citizens of Israel, with all the same rights and privileges as their Jewish fellows.

But what happened to those refugees—by best estimates about 600,000 of them? Did their "Arab brethren" allow them to settle in their countries, to work, and to become productive citizens and useful members of their societies? No! They kept and still keep them, their children, their grandchildren, and in some cases even their great-grandchildren, in miserable "refugee camps", so that they can be used as political and military pawns in order to keep the burning hatred against Israel alive and in order to supply the manpower for the unremitting fight against Israel.

During those more than sixty years, Israel has taken in more than three million Jewish immigrants from all parts of the world and has integrated them productively into its society. According to the "Palestinians", the Arab "refugees" have now marvelously increased to five million (!). It is the intent and fervent desire of the Arabs that all of them should return to Israel so as to destroy the country without the necessity of war.

The "refugees" are a red herring and another myth created by the Arab propaganda machine.

The Arab propaganda machine, aided by the most high-powered public relations firms in the United States and all over, has created myths that, by dint of constant repetition, have been accepted as truth by much of the world. No sensible discussion, no peace in the Middle East, is possible until those Arab myths have been exposed for what they are.

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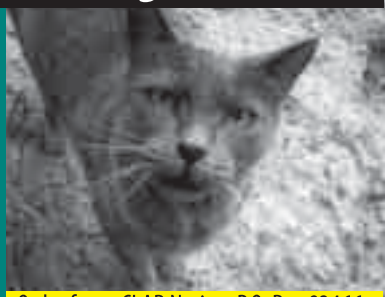
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sands of words are invested in describing the intricacies of the Commodore's Nicaragua venture, requiring some heroic efforts on the reader's part to follow what's going on. At the same time, Stiles strains to connect Vanderbilt's homelier commercial machinations to matters of much greater national import—the sectional conflict over slavery, the collapse of the Whig Party—but these contrived attempts to lend his everyday life greater historical weight almost always fall flat.

Gilding the image of the First Tycoon has worse consequences. Vanderbilt quite consciously constructed a family dynasty, one mainly based on his railroad holdings. Stiles knows that, but, determined to paint a picture of Vanderbilt as the architect of modernity and the modern corporation in particular, he ends up conflating dynastic capitalism with its corporate successor. Vanderbilt's New York Central did not initially exercise the rationalizing, bureaucratic management already installed on other major railroads, and even after the Commodore assumed command he practiced the kind of personal and familial control he'd favored his whole life. If he did engage in major reorganization of the road along corporate lines, turning it into a complex, impersonal hierarchy run by a cadre of managerial and technical professionals, Stiles provides the reader very little evidence of it. Besides, the modern corporation behaves quite differently, both in the marketplace and the political arena, from its dynastic predecessor. Here's what a dynasty sounds like: "The law, as I view it, goes too slow for me when I have remedy in my own hands.... Let the other parties go to the law if they want, but by God I think I know what the law is; I have had enough of it." Vanderbilt's words are not those of a faceless corporate suit sensitive to his company's intricate interactions with government bureaucrats and the courts, someone whose loyalty to and tenure at any specific corporation is a contingent one and hardly informed by the patriarchal ambitions of family lineage. Dynastic capitalism rests on an identity of interest and outlook between its owners and managers, since they are more or less the same people; the modern corporation severs that link. Stiles seems willfully blind to the distinction, so intent is he on proving Vanderbilt's surpassing historical stature.

That's because, for Stiles, associating Vanderbilt with modernity is axiomatically a good thing. He admires the tycoon's pathbreaking, visionary ventures into the new world of corporate stocks and bonds and other forms of hypothecated paper values subject to the unpredictable fluctuations of the marketplace. There's no denying that the rise of financial capitalism was a revolutionary transformation, a radical rupture with a traditional economic outlook whose measure of value remained tied to tangible manifestations of real, physical property, gold currency and the like. The new way of doing things allowed for the mobilization of liquid capital resources and their investment in all sorts of productive enterprises. Vanderbilt became a major player in this mysterious parallel economy. He faced off against rival speculators for control of various railroads, most notoriously the Erie, known far and wide as the "scarlet woman of Wall Street" because of the way it was looted and relooted by stock manipulators like Daniel Drew, Jay Gould and the Commodore. For Stiles that is the end of the story: Vanderbilt as pioneer of modern finance.

But these financial mechanisms also spawned a paper economy of fictitious value that might grossly over- or underestimate the actual value of the tangible assets they were supposed to represent, creating the conditions for periodic booms, busts and panics. Stiles dismisses the reservations of Vanderbilt's contemporaries about this strange new world as old-fashioned, parochial and nearsighted. He takes for granted that the notion of real value is a delusion, that the market is the sole and ultimate arbiter of what anything is worth. That is the modern view. But those old-time, unenlightened anxieties about "fictitious value" don't sound so retrograde in light of our recent financial meltdown and its impact on the "real economy," nor did they in the Commodore's day during the panics and depressions of 1837, 1857 and 1873 (the most devastating one of all).

East Coast Brahmins like Henry and Charles Francis Adams, Oliver Wendell Holmes and E.L. Godkin were among the many critics of Vanderbilt and the ascendancy of the giant corporation. They, along with legions of less well-known opponents of the Commodore within the nascent labor movement and among distressed and angry farmers and middling businessmen, originated the robber-baron stigma that shadowed Vanderbilt and his fellow tycoons well into the twentieth century. Even the *New York Times* acknowledged the existence of a "modern aristocracy of capital" and described the new breed of corporate capitalists as "the tyrants of modern society." Stiles treats this language as incoherent but without explaining why. To be sure, there is a profound historical difference between the aristocrat and the capitalist. But the political significance of the analogy made by the *Times* and others was clear enough.

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Stiles thinks the Adamses, Godkin and other patrician critics of the First Tycoon were cynics. After all, they loathed trade unions, lamented that Anglo-Protestant America was being mongrelized by immigrants, feared and deplored mass democratic politics, considered Populists to be hayseeds and were appalled as much by the vulgarity of the new tycoonery as they were by its inordinate power. Stiles says these unsavory views discredit the Brahmins' withering critique of the robber barons' greed, corruption and exploitation. But the charge is a cheap shot and also reflects a kind of intellectual snobbery. After all, the Brahmins' criticisms were echoed in the indictments against the robber barons leveled by the Knights of Labor, farmer-labor and greenback political parties and anti-monopoly leagues, men and women untainted by the reactionary views of their social superiors. But these anonymous or less well-known political actors don't turn up in *The First Tycoon*. They are as invisible to Stiles as they were noxious to Godkin.

Cornelius Vanderbilt liked to memorialize himself. One enduring monument—and vital piece of railroad centralization that substantially improved the New York Central's economic efficiency—was the original Grand Central Terminal, completed in 1871. Stiles piles up in front of the reader a mountain of statistics about the extraordinary volume and diversity of materials used to build the station. It's impressive. But there is another set of numbers Stiles shows no interest in compiling or analyzing. During this formative phase of industrialization, 35,000 workers died each year in industrial accidents. In 1910 one-quarter of all workers in the iron and steel industries were injured once a year, partly because of management's failure to install safety devices or to shorten the hours of work. Between 1890 and 1917, 158,000 mechanics and laborers were killed in railroad repair shops and roundhouses. In 1888–89 alone, of the 704,000 railroad employees, 20,000 were injured and nearly 2,000 killed. On the Illinois Central between 1874 and 1884, one out of every twenty trainmen died or was disabled; among brakemen, railroaders who did the most dangerous work, the ratio was one in seven (and among railroad switchmen the number was almost as alarming). Part of the reason for this horrendous record of disfigurement and death was management's relentless drive to increase the workload: brakemen, for example, were required to brake four or five cars rather than the two or three that had been the custom earlier. Yet the air brake, invented by George Westinghouse, had been available since 1869. It was expensive to install, however, and the railroad tycoons did nothing until its installation was required by federal legislation in 1893. The accident rate then declined promptly and precipitously by 60 percent.

Stiles insists that Vanderbilt deserves to be treated as a pioneer of modern industrial capitalism. If that's so, and certainly there's a case to be made, then what is more fundamental than understanding his relationship to wage labor, upon which the whole system rests? Thousands of workers, not Vanderbilt alone, made the road what it was. Did they end up dead and disabled in numbers comparable to, less than or more than their co-workers on other lines? Was the Commodore particularly solicitous about their welfare? Did he install the air brake? If not, why not? Did he share the bellicose view of people like Tom Scott of the Pennsylvania Railroad or was he, given his lowly social origins, more sympathetic, conciliatory perhaps? What was it like to work for one of the Commodore's great enterprises? *The First Tycoon* has little to say about any of this, and its silence helps sustain the romance of the misunderstood robber baron.

Not that everyone was silent. Stiles cites an open letter of 1869 from Mark Twain to Vanderbilt in which Twain indicts the tycoon's rapaciousness and greed. But what really bothers Twain (and Stiles emphasizes this) is the idolatry that Vanderbilt's fortune inspired among ordinary people: "You seem to be the idol of only a crawling swarm of small souls, who love to glorify your most flagrant unworthiness in print or praise your vast possessions worshippingly; or sing of your unimportant private habits and sayings and doings, as if your millions gave them dignity." Anyone living during the last quarter century must be acutely aware that the inclination to genuflect before great wealth has once again become a national pastime. It began back in the days of the First Tycoon. It is another, perhaps less savory contribution of the Commodore's, or at least of his fellow robber barons. But while Stiles is eager to interrogate critics of that idolatry—Twain's views are fairly presented but then derogated as the work of a "cynic"—he stays mum about the origins, meaning and consequences of the cult itself. Such silence is inherent in the genre of the misunderstood robber baron. It takes for granted what Twain and others worried about; indeed, it asks us to follow its example and prostrate ourselves before the captains, commodores and kings of great wealth. ■

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BACK TALK

ADRIAN BELLESGUARD

Amy Bach

In *Ordinary Injustice: How America Holds Court* (Metropolitan; $27), legal writer and erstwhile law professor Amy Bach uncovers a clubby system in which overworked lawyers and law enforcement officers are often more loyal to each other than to their clients, and become blind to the human consequences of routine error and business as usual. —*Christine Smallwood*

What was the genesis of this book?

I was reporting a series of civil rights articles and went to Greene County, Georgia, in 2001, where I watched a public defender plead forty-eight people guilty in a little over a day. And I saw several people break down. People would start to cry and say, Wait, I didn't realize I was going to jail. They didn't understand what they were pleading guilty to, and that was because the attorney had never talked to them about the facts of their cases. Afterward the public defender said something I will never forget: "Nobody could say that they didn't have their day in court."

You write about situations where the prosecutor is exercising discretion about which cases to bring to trial, acting within his legal rights, and yet the result is injustice.

In Quitman County, Mississippi, I found that entire categories of cases had disappeared. I met one woman—this is the most shocking thing—she had been beaten up by her boyfriend with a tire iron underneath a bridge while her daughter and niece watched, locked inside a car. I heard that the prosecutor hadn't prosecuted a domestic violence case in at least twenty-one years. He wanted to spend his resources and time on cases that he was sure he could win. So if an attention-getting crime happened, he would pursue it vigorously. But for cases that required legwork and tricky maneuvering—generally, domestic violence cases can be difficult, or that's the preconception—he would put those aside. Prosecutors get elected by the citizenry, and they often will announce their win/loss records, or convictions. You don't want to lose.

Procedural rights—specifically the right to plea-bargain—can wind up hurting defendants.

If you exercise your right to a trial, you'll often get hit with a greater sentence than if you took the plea bargain. When you take the plea bargain you're essentially bargaining away your right to assert your rights, and that's part of the deal. It's a crazy gamble to make. The system is beautifully set up with all sorts of rights that are accorded to defendants, all sorts of protections for the little guy. But in practice those rights are extremely difficult to assert. The problem is that there are so many new laws that people can break; there's such a tremendous influx of people into the criminal justice system because more and more people are being charged. The system just can't hold a trial for everybody unless a different type of trial system is created.

In the book I discuss a woman in Troy, New York, who is arrested for trespassing. She's sitting on a stoop braiding somebody's hair and there's a sign that says, "No Trespassing." She's arrested and taken to jail. She's a nurse. She's in jail for eight days and misses work. When she's finally brought back to court, she has a public defender, but she never recalls meeting him. On the day she pleads guilty, she's slapped with a fine. She could have contested it and had a trial, but she doesn't; she wants to get out of there. She can't miss any more work. She has five kids; she's a single mom. Several months later, she's applying for public housing and she is rejected because she has a misdemeanor conviction. Just by asserting her rights, the system punishes her.

You tell the story of Michael Evans and Paul Terry, who at 17 were imprisoned for raping and murdering a 9-year-old girl. Twenty-seven years later, they were exonerated. Evans's mother and sister continued to set a place at the dinner table for him for nearly three decades. They were in jail, too.

First of all, there are costs to the individual. Paul Terry basically came out insane, as any normal person would after twenty-seven years in prison. He has never recovered. And Michael Evans, too, has pretty much been left without a compass. There's the individual costs and the costs to the families. But I also think that there's a cost to the people who work in the system. The people who "perpetrate" these injustices don't have bad intentions. Everybody thinks that they want to do justice. And yet at the same time, they know that they're doing something wrong. Tom Breen, the prosecutor on the case, came forward two decades later and said, "I think I could have made a mistake." It's hard to work in a system that's so dysfunctional. The attorneys and law enforcement officers lose their mind a little bit. They have some knowledge of that. It's upsetting because nobody wants to fail on a daily basis. People want to do their jobs well, but for various systemic reasons they can't.

How can the system be fixed?

My book calls for monitoring and measurement. Right now we can't see that errors are being made. Leading scholars agree that the courts are the most unexamined public institution in America. We measure our schools, the purity of the water supply. Why do we leave our courts alone? What kinds of cases are being prosecuted? What kinds of cases are not being prosecuted? How many people are pleading guilty? How many people are pleading guilty without attorneys? How high are the bails? We need to start paying attention to the ordinary. Right now the scorecard is the big, important trials that grab the media's attention. But that's just not enough. People should be thinking about how to create new scorecards. We have to start thinking about how to document the ways that regular people are actually treated. ■

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Evicted From His Own Head

by ELAINE BLAIR

Memories of the Future
By Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky.
Translated by Joanne Turnbull, with Nikolai Formozov.
New York Review Books.
228 pp. Paper $15.95.

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky is a writer even most Russians knew nothing about until his work was resurrected from Soviet archives and published—most of it for the first time—in the late 1980s. He was ethnically Polish and grew up near Kiev. He studied law without much enthusiasm, worked for an attorney in that city for a few years and spent as much time as he could writing and lecturing on literature, drama and music. In 1922, when he was in his mid-30s, he moved to Moscow hoping to make a living from his writing.

His timing was not auspicious. Krzhizhanovsky became acquainted with other Moscow writers, gave private readings of his work and collaborated on scripts with experimental theater director Alexander Tairov. But publication eluded him. In the story "The Bookmark," he describes the situation of a writer who has arrived in Moscow just after the revolution with a collection of stories he's eager to publish. One editor after another rejects his manuscript: the style and subject do not fit with the new Soviet ways of thinking. "On one manuscript," the writer recalls, "I remember finding the penciled comment: *Psychologizing*." Another editor tells him:

> You have talent.... [But] your stories are, well, how shall I put it? Untimely. Put them away—let them wait. In the meantime.... Have you ever tried writing criticism? A reappraisal, say, of reappraisals? You know what I mean. Do try.

Krzhizhanovsky did try, scratching out a living for decades writing criticism and entries for the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. Friends helped him to obtain sinecures so that he would not be in danger of arrest for being unemployed. Some of his stories came close to being published in collections that were censored before they went to press. Many stories—including the seven in *Memories of the Future*, available for the first time in the United States—he never even showed to publishers. It's not hard to see why. His stories depict, with remarkable frankness—and with a mix of surrealism, fantasy and satire, all of which were falling out of favor with the Communist Party—the poverty and political repression of 1920s Russia.

The subject of the story "Quadraturin" is a Soviet city dweller, Sutulin, who lives in an apartment so tiny that when he hears a knock on his door one evening, he doesn't need to get out of bed to open it: he merely "threaded a toe through the door handle, and pulled." The stranger at the door persuades Sutulin to take a free sample of an experimental substance that is supposed to make rooms bigger. Sutulin begins to apply the Quadraturin to his walls as the instructions on the tube advise, but he accidentally spills the entire contents of the tube on his floor. He wakes up the next morning in a "faintly familiar, large, but ungainly room," where his furniture looks awkward and the angles of the walls are uneven. He enjoys the novel pleasure of strolling from one end of his room to the other, but he must enjoy it in secret, for like other citizens he is legally allotted only ninety-seven square feet of living space, and owning more than his share could mean losing his apartment. Sutulin is, like Akaky Akakievich, Raskolnikov and Joseph K, a bachelor whose quarters contain a secret—something at least obscurely embarrassing, perhaps criminal. As usual, there is a talkative landlady and neighbors to be avoided. Sutulin realizes he has to buy curtains to hide his apartment from the eyes of passers-by.

It only gets worse from there: every time Sutulin leaves the room, he returns to find that his apartment has grown still bigger. He realizes that he forgot to apply Quadraturin to the ceiling, so his apartment is only growing outward, not upward, the dimensions increasingly oppressive even as the room becomes larger. It outgrows its electric circuitry and Sutulin is trapped in the darkness. "He knew that there, behind his back, the dead, Quadraturinized space with its black corners was still spreading."

The scenario is a nightmare familiar to the Russian imagination: a vast expanse of space, terrifying in scope, its limits invisible, its territory inhospitable. And this is Sutulin's punishment for having wanted to escape the other Russian nightmare, the squalor of cramped urban quarters. "Quadraturin" is the story most obviously indebted to Gogol in this collection, Sutulin's apartment evoking both the windy square where Akakievich loses his prized possession in "The Overcoat" and the sprawling country itself that Gogol apostrophizes at the end of part one of *Dead Souls*. Its dark, expressionistic Moscow settings and flashes of paranoid humor also owe something to the Russian symbolists, in particular to Andrei Bely's novel *Petersburg*.

But "Quadraturin" is not particularly representative of the collection—no single story is. Krzhizhanovsky tried out different tones, framing devices and surreal and fantastical juxtapositions, many of which Western readers would later know better through his near-contemporary Mikhail Bulgakov, as well as Kafka, Borges and the French Surrealists. (According to translator Joanne Turnbull's introduction, Krzhizhanovsky did not read Kafka until 1939, and was "very surprised.") Krzhizhanovsky called his own work "experimental realism," and the second word applies as much as the first: his are not the experiments of the Russian futurists. Krzhizhanovsky is not interested in picking apart the sense-making mechanisms of language that readers take for granted. Instead he is feeling out ways of conveying both the quotidian dreariness and the horrifying threat of violence of 1920s Soviet life. The diffi-

MOISEI NAPPELBAUM

Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, 1925

Elaine Blair is the author of Literary St. Petersburg. *Her writing has appeared in* The New York Review of Books, n+1 *and other publications.*

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culties of adjusting to Soviet society was a recurring subject among writers on the left through much of the 1920s, and some of them—including Vladimir Mayakovsky, Evgeny Zamyatin and Yuri Olesha—produced scathing depictions of smug party hacks and their attempts to regiment most aspects of daily life. But Krzhizhanovsky's pessimism about Soviet life seems to run deeper than theirs, unchecked by any hint of communist ideals.

Sutulin's name presumably comes from the word *sutuliy*, which means slouched—a posture that Krzhizhanovsky's Soviet citizens have much reason and opportunity to assume. In the story "Red Snow" (1930) a Moscow bachelor, Shushashin, begins every day with an unusual exercise regimen: "he walks over to the wall, puts his back up against it and stands there in an attitude of utter resignation. For a minute or two. And that's all. The exercise is over. He can begin to live." Shushashin is unemployed and spends part of his day following fruitless job leads, then idly wanders the streets. On his walks through the fog-shrouded city, he overhears his fellow citizens' guarded discussions of the new political and economic realities of the country. One man says to another, "Oh, dear sir, from your apartment you say.... But I've been evicted from my own head." Shushashin sits down on a bench where, at the other end, a couple abruptly stop talking, then resume their conversation in murmurs. "Haven't you noticed how in the last few years our life has been permeated by nonexistence?" the man asks his companion. "We're still immured in our old space, like the stumps in a felled forest. But our lives have long since been stacked in piles, and not for us but for others."

Shushashin is no eavesdropper—he does not want to hear these conversations and even fears looking the interlocutors in the eye, such is his general meekness and sense of unease. But there are people everywhere, looming suddenly out of the fog before he can avoid them, and he helplessly catches bits of their dialogue. A man is telling a story to two friends: "So then, he was nearing his building.... It was late at night and all the windows were dark, but in his a light was burning. You know why. And whether he went up or he didn't: either way he was done for." The possibility of a light at his own window—that is, a visit from the secret police—haunts Shushashin as he hurries home. To his relief, "*his* window was dark." But in his own bed, in his "almost restful" room in a noisy communal apartment, his actual nightmare begins: he dreams of terrifying encounters in the streets of a familiar but darker Moscow:

> Facing him was a man of an exceedingly peaceable, if slightly hunched appearance: having set his briefcase down beside his left overshoe, he took hold of his head and began—using the even, circular motion one does with an electric light bulb—to unscrew it from his collar. Shushashin tried to glimpse the hunched man's face, but his head flipped so fast—nose-nape-nose-nape—it couldn't be apperceived. Twist, one more twist, and the hunched man's hand was holding out his head to the shocked Shushashin, exactly as a beggar does his wooden bowl for a well-meaning coin.

During the day, Shushashin's fellow Muscovites dare only to speak elliptically about the arrests and denunciations that are multiplying around them. At night he dreams grotesque fantasies through which he seems to apprehend the violence of the postrevolutionary state. History gets revised, ideological ground shifts, people disappear, facts are elusive and no one can attempt to talk or write directly about what's happening. Only the illogic of dreams can adequately convey the experience of Soviet life, and Krzhizhanovsky's characters do a lot of dreaming.

In "The Branch Line," a commuter named Quantin falls asleep on a train, using his briefcase as a pillow. He dreams that the train has dropped him off in an otherworldly city where he sees crowds of people marching with placards (GLORY TO THE UNWAKEABLE). Quantin stumbles into an auditorium where a speaker is exhorting "the kingdom of dreams" to revolt against reality.

> Reality since Pascal's time has lost much of its constancy and invariability, events of recent years are rocking it, the way the waves do a boat; nearly every day the morning papers give waking up a new reality, whereas dreams.... Haven't we hoodwinked humanity with that sweet million-brain dream of brotherhood, a united dream about unity?... We'll break the backs of facts.

Krzhizhanovsky realizes that the Soviet revolution not only overturned government, economic and social status, religious practice and traditional means of employment; it was an assault on one's very perception of reality. The rules of logic might be violated by the press, the most obvious lies passed off as truths. But the extent of this assault became clear, for Krzhizhanovsky and most Russians, only in retrospect, years after the revolution, as Stalin expanded the list of forbidden subjects while publishing ever more false denunciations and revisionist interpretations of the recent past.

The longest piece in this collection, a sort of science fiction novella called "Memories of the Future," is suffused with regret, in hindsight, about the events of 1917. Its hero, Max Shterer, born before the revolution to a provincial landowning family, spends decades developing a time travel machine. Cataclysmic political events are little more to Shterer than obstacles to his time travel plans. He's nearly finished building the device when he gets drafted into the war. He takes the first opportunity to be captured and gives "himself up to the Germans for safe-keeping": this gives him ample time to think about his machine while pacing the grounds of the prison camp, and protects him from premature death by a bullet before he can carry out his scheme.

Meanwhile, back in Russia, the Bolsheviks stage a coup. For Shterer, this is a nuisance: he can't collect the inheritance his father recently left him, which Shterer planned to invest in his machine. When he returns to Russia from the German prison, his country's poverty and chaos register merely as further impediments to his work. Shterer finally gets money to complete his machine when he pitches his invention to some formerly rich Muscovites desperate to get back to prerevolutionary years. "To at least 1861, or ten years before that," requests a former czarist general, referring to the year that serfs were freed. Shterer takes the last of their money and finishes his machine, but the white Russians never get a return on their investment. Shterer takes the maiden—and only—voyage alone.

He makes it all the way to 1957, but what exactly he sees there Krzhizhanovsky pointedly leaves out of the story. All we know is that Shterer sees something shockingly bleak. Something that makes him reflect, for the first time, about the events of the past. He turns his time machine around and heads back toward the years of revolution and civil war—years that he paid so little attention to when he was living through them. On his way to the past, however, his machine is destroyed, and he finds himself

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deposited back in the late 1920s, not long after he originally departed. He returns to his own era to walk the streets of Moscow in a daze, wandering toward a bench where a prostitute is sitting. She assumes—incorrectly—that "the approaching male shape" must be a potential customer.

> "From out of town?"
>
> The figure nodded. The woman whistled.…
>
> "What do you want from Moscow? The good old days?"
>
> The figure turned toward the question.
>
> "Yes." And after a second's pause: "The good old years. Since I didn't understand, I'll have to go through them again and again until…"
>
> The man's voice and intonation were exceedingly serious and intent. The woman peered at him uneasily: could be a lunatic.
>
> A slight wind came up. In an effort to redirect the conversation, she said, "The night's nearly gone."
>
> The man, his outline becoming gradually clearer in the half-light, leaned lower to the ground.
>
> "I know a night about which you could never say that."
>
> This bore little resemblance to an offer to go to bed.

The novella's mix of science and satire takes unusual form. Like the hero of H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, Shterer narrates his experience of time travel to a group of rapt fellow intellectuals; he lingers on the mechanics of his machine but unlike Wells's hero doesn't actually get around to telling his listeners about what he's seen in the future. Krzhizhanovsky, an admirer of Wells, seems curiously uninterested in using the premise of time travel to imagine the world of the future. The novella is clearly not the kind of Russian utopian science fiction that was popular in the years before and just after the revolution, when leftist writers like the Bolshevik revolutionary Alexander Bogdanov, the author of *Red Star* (1908), projected their ideal of a technologically advanced communist society into the distant future. But neither is it a futuristic satire in the vein of Zamyatin's *We*. Krzhizhanovsky does not intend "Memories of the Future" as a corrective to the problems he observes in Bolshevik society; there are no satirical extrapolations from the present, no details about what exactly awaits his countrymen. It is an expression of pure pessimism that suggests correctives are useless.

The story is dated 1929, by which time Krzhizhanovsky, along with most other writers, would have had intimations of the unprecedented brutality and philistinism of Stalin's reign, even if the show trials and terror were still to come. Until the end of the 1920s there was a good deal of literary ferment among writers on the left. These writers could still openly argue with one another over how—if at all—they should be serving the socialist state, and they debated both how to write (realism? fantasy? abstraction?) and how to live (like a regimented factory worker or a nineteenth-century bohemian?). But at the end of the decade new party directives swiftly changed literary culture. The range of permissible art forms narrowed to the kind of conservative, ideologically driven parables that would later be called socialist realism; the great Modernist experiments of the revolutionary era came to an end. The militant writers' union RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) harassed, fired and censored anyone whose writing was experimental or satirical or frank about Soviet society. In 1929 RAPP declared the new Five Year Plan the only acceptable subject for writers.

Krzhizhanovsky's stories are full of metaphorical reminders of the silence imposed on writers and artists. Shterer is befriended by a writer in his building who persuades him to write a memoir about his time travels to earn money for the materials he needs to rebuild the machine. But an astounded publisher tells Shterer he can't possibly publish this dark vision—it would at the very least cost him his job. Nonetheless, the manuscript takes on a life of its own, secretly copied and circulated, presumably with the assistance of the publisher himself. People start whispering about it; it has admirers but also, apparently, critics. Not long after the meeting with the publisher, Shterer disappears. His neighbor goes to look for him one morning only to find that Shterer's tiny apartment—which had been made out of a closet—has been put to another purpose: "the entire under-stairs closet, right up to the ceiling, was stacked with sticks of stovewood; pressed snugly together, their flat ends protruded from the throat of the cage like a tight damp gag."

Krzhizhanovsky knew his stories and his associations with prominent Moscow writers put him in a precarious position; he hid his work at the houses of friends during the terror in the hope of preserving it should he get arrested. Some of his acquaintances were arrested and killed. Like some of the characters in his stories, he worried that he would come home to find the secret police in his apartment. The worry did not, however, keep him from writing through the 1930s. Perhaps he had a prescient sense of the arbitrary nature of the purges. If loyal Bolsheviks could get arrested and killed for no apparent reason, why *not* write critically about Soviet conditions? He stopped writing fiction in the early 1940s, possibly because he was drinking heavily and in poor health, though he continued to make a modest living from literary criticism and lectures until he died in 1950.

The fascination of Krzhizhanovsky's work today is also its limitation: the blatant criticism of the Soviet regime that makes itself felt, in different ways, in every one of the stories. Each is about a man and his private reckoning with the political, economic and social conditions of post-revolutionary Russia. There seems to be no room for any kind of struggle but the one between citizen and state. For Krzhizhanovsky's characters this struggle is silent and inward rather than confrontational, and the need for secrecy creates an atmosphere of intense loneliness and isolation. There is a kind of aridity in these stories when it comes to human relations. The family drama, friendship, love, marriage—none play any significant role. Sex is a little joke well out on the margins of life. As for the pointless humiliations of existence and the baser human impulses, these are, for Krzhizhanovsky, bound up with the new regime and culture, which, of course, offers no shortage of examples.

Turnbull writes in the introduction that a Soviet editor dismissed Krzhizhanovsky's work as "untimely," a common shorthand for fiction that was not politically correct. But of course Krzhizhanovsky's stories are exactly and deliberately timely: they observe the follies and cruelties of early Soviet life. Even knowing that they would not be published, Krzhizhanovsky continued to write his stories for the drawer (as the Soviet saying about dissident writing goes), hoping, presumably, that one day someone other than his friends and family would read them. From that drawer Krzhizhanovsky's work mutely skewered and censured the regime for fifty-some years. His stories are full of insight into official Soviet culture—insight that proved both prescient and useless. By the time his work was finally published in 1989, the millions who would be killed were already dead, and his countrymen needed no convincing about the corruption and violence of the Soviet state. ■

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ORGANIZATIONS

ASHEVILLE, NC, *Nation* discussion group forming. Contact mgibney@unca.edu.

THE SPOKANE/INLAND NORTHWEST *Nation* discussion group: PO Box 293, Cheney, WA 99004; locus29@aol.com.

SAN ANTONIO *Nation* discussion group. Second Mondays, Grady's Bar-B-Q at San Pedro and Jackson Keller. Contact lenwheeler@satx.rr.com for more information.

RICHMOND, VA, *Nation* discussion group seeks new members. Contact Wayne Young, (804) 232-8521, youngwayne88838@aol.com.

A NEW *NATION* UTAH YAHOO GROUP has been created at groups.yahoo.com/group/thenationutah. To join, contact Sam Evans, (801) 791-8089 or sameritech@yahoo.com.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

CHICAGO PSYCHOTHERAPIST, twenty-five years, all issues including depression, anxiety, relationships, creative blocks. Sliding scale, insurance. Deborah Hellerstein, PhD, (312) 409-9516. therapyinchicago.com.

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SPIRITUAL SERVICES

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VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

GUARDIAN ANGEL, *Nation* reader reaches level of incompetence, seeks help to right a wrong: (1) pro bono services of Texas attorney experienced in health insurance claim matters; (2) pro bono services of physician specialist(s) in heavy metal toxicity; (3) Hollywood or other generous benefactor; and (4) investigative (preferably environmental) reporter. Chris Kuykendall, (512) 463-1143 (work, Texas Legislative Council) or (512) 459-8375 (home).

Events

NATIONAL

Economy Connection

■ War and global capitalism. Unemployment and recession. For speakers and resources on these and related topics, contact Economy Connection, a project of the Union for Radical Political Economics. We can provide speakers for formal or informal events sponsored by community groups, unions, high schools, colleges or political organizations. Our speakers can talk about wealth and poverty, and the economic forces that generate increasing income inequality between and within countries. They can cut through the confusing terminology that is used to prevent ordinary, intelligent people (with and without college degrees) from understanding and participating in discussions on the policies that affect our lives. Tell us what you need, and we will look for a speaker who is right for you. Contact us at (201) 792-7459 or soapbox@urpe.org. Join URPE! urpe.org; (413) 577-0806; URPE@labornet.org.

The advertising deadline for Events is every Thursday. Rates: $210 for 50 words; $260 for 75 words, additional words (above 75) $2.00 each. To place an ad, call Amanda at (212) 209-5414.

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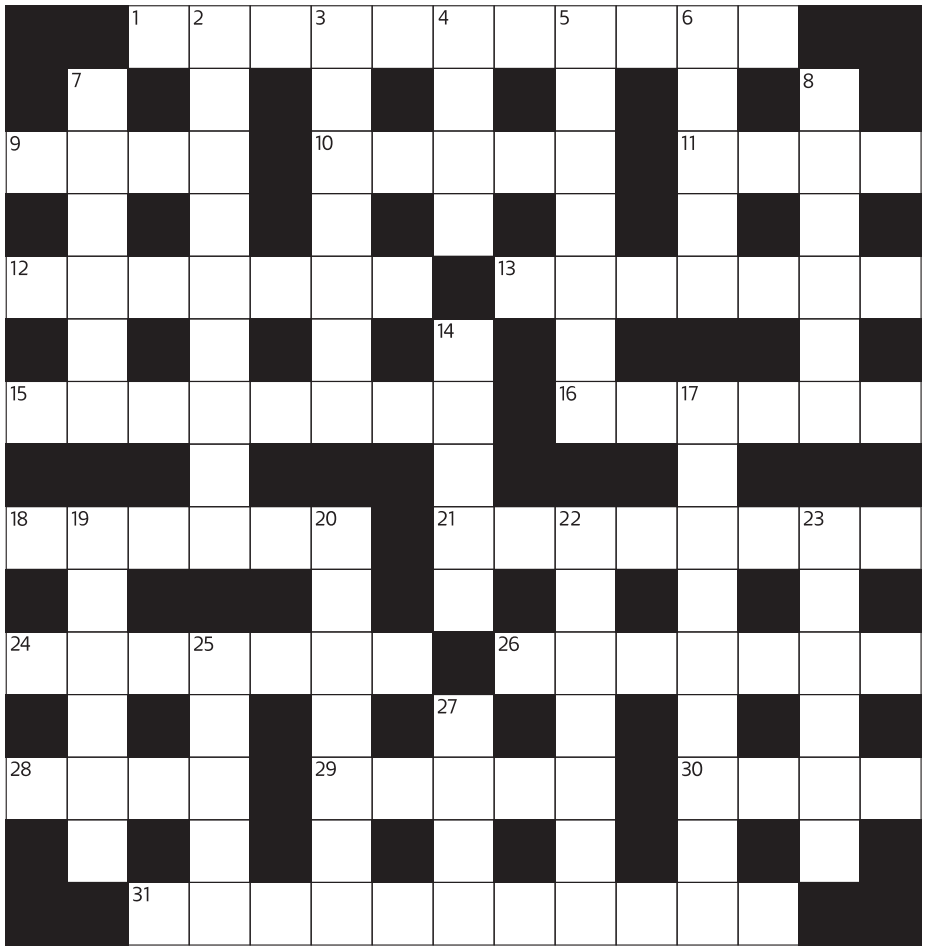
Puzzle No. 3193

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Sob convulsed Leo, upset by aroma on the way out. (11)

9 Spirit proves to exist, I hear, by a river in Mexico (4)

10 Happening that's not at all odd and ends with tea, one hears. (5)

11 Look in the small projectile for an amorphous form. (4)

12 Stars fell when these came in, proving casual alcoholics after a short time. (7)

13 A resting place for curmudgeons, or just a description of bad writing? (7)

15 In glasses, sorbet for the tax man! (8)

16 Old-fashioned cool dude seen in PC atelier. (6)

18 Barters bad treads? (6)

21 Janitor dude is secretly a reporter. (8)

24 Mixed-up Molly, missing the start of lesson, takes a snapshot of the international amateur competition. (7)

26 Folded rain mat from the Red Planet. (7)

28 Broken-down, worn-out old horses could mean a hold-up in plans. (4)

29 Lately this is a replacement for problem, but it might be what you're holding! (5)

30 You may find them swimming up a stream—alcohol, mostly. (4)

31 Crazy younger lads! Some find living this exhilarating! (11)

DOWN

2 "Look, Bob, lock!" he advises. "Dolt!" (9)

3 No spree, perhaps, for those who start the show. (7)

4 Never lose a point at any time! (4)

5 Old cough producer is wild arch rat! (7)

6 Sounds like a negative vote cut short rich big-shot. (5)

7 Rats go crookedly for coarsely cracked grain. (6)

8 Store in the barrio, opened by Business Opportunity District initially, closes in regressive age. (6)

14 Get over, though in a bad mood. (5)

17 Was Long John Silver? (9)

19 He is the hero of the oldest song in his country, alternatively rising to come down! (6)

20 Accidentally wins pig—which amounts to stealing! (7)

22 A letup, a rearrangement to reach a stable level. (7)

23 Caught in trap at Hyderabad, this is what you feel when you couldn't care less. (6)

25 Mother pockets a grand for hot underground stuff. (5)

27 Emperor in St. Petersburg, or deranged star? (4)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3192

B	E	H	A	V	I	N	G	■	M	A	R	B	L	E
I	■	E	■	I	■	O	■	C	■	U	■	R	■	N
T	U	R	N	O	U	T	■	O	R	D	E	A	L	S
T	■	O	■	L	■	A	■	F	■	I	■	Z	■	I
E	R	N	I	E	■	B	E	F	I	T	T	I	N	G
R	■	■	■	N	■	L	■	E	■	■	■	L	■	N
L	I	S	Z	T	■	E	M	E	N	D	I	N	G	■
Y	■	E	■	L	■	■	■	■	■	O	■	U	■	S
■	P	L	A	Y	T	I	M	E	■	N	I	T	R	O
S	■	F	■	■	■	C	■	R	■	I	■	■	■	C
C	R	I	T	I	C	I	S	M	■	Z	E	B	R	A
A	■	S	■	M	■	E	■	I	■	E	■	E	■	L
R	E	H	E	A	R	S	■	N	A	T	U	R	A	L
E	■	L	■	G	■	T	■	E	■	T	■	E	■	E
D	R	Y	D	E	N	■	A	S	S	I	S	T	E	D

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Exhausted, But Just Can't Fall Asleep?

New breakthrough will help you fall asleep faster, sleep deeper and awake more refreshed.

Sleep is the only way we can recharge our brain and restore important neurotransmitters. Sleep is also the time when the body does most of its repair work including rebuilding and restoring muscle tissue. This is because growth hormones are secreted during sleep, which is essential to rebuilding tissues.

Consequences Of Too Little Sleep

There is a growing body of evidence indicating that chronic sleep deprivation increases risk of early death. In addition, one of the fastest growing areas of research is the link between chronic sleep deprivation and the risk of becoming overweight and obesity. Sleep deprivation can lead to:

- Greater risk of heart disease
- Increased risk of illness
- Thinking impairments, like slower reaction time, memory loss & confusion
- Poor work performance
- Mood problems like depression, anger & irritability
- Risk of unhealthy weight gain & loss

"I had problems sleeping for several years but never wanted to take prescription meds because of possible side effects. I have taken RestAid® every night for over two weeks, and I've never slept better. I fall asleep within a half hour of taking it, and I stay asleep longer. " —Scott M.

Results not typical.

"I used to lie in bed for hours and...toss and turn...I would only get 4-5 hours of sleep per night...which just wasn't enough for me. RestAid® has seriously helped me. I can sleep without a problem and sleep soundly all night long. It has improved my life in so many ways."

—Maggie R.

Results not typical.

Lack Of Sleep Impacts 1 In 6 Adults

The National Sleep Foundation's Sleep in America polls reveal that over a six year period only about half of adults get a good night's sleep every night. Sleep deficit is frequently related to too much caffeine, nicotine and alcohol. It is also related to stress, long hours at work, night shifts and working on home computers before going to sleep.

New Non-Prescription Breakthrough

Before resorting to expensive prescription sleeping pills with potential negative side effects, try RestAid®. RestAid® is an all-natural sleeping supplement that will help you fall asleep faster, sleep deeper and awake more refreshed.

RestAid® utilizes a Patented Cysteine Milk Peptide® that is clinically proven to break down natural stimulants, toxic substances, alcohol and caffeine – all known to interrupt your sleep cycles. Its delivery system gets the nutrients into the blood stream much quicker than other supplements.

HOW RESTAID® WORKS
RestAid® contains the perfect combination of Cysteine Milk Peptide® and Melatonin. Cysteine Milk Peptide® counteracts toxins, stimulants and alcohol which disrupt sleep patterns and Melatonin works naturally to synchronize your body's sleep rhythm.
Cysteine Milk Peptide® – Shown in clinical studies to immediately boost levels of Glutathione, which is a substance produced by the body that is needed to break down toxins such as caffeine and alcohol that disrupt our natural sleep patterns.
Vitamin B12 – is proven to cause an earlier release of Melatonin at night, which resets the sleep-wake cycle.
Melatonin – is a hormone produced by the body that naturally increases sleep efficiency.
Lemon Balm Extract – is a natural sedative that soothes and relaxes your mind and body.
Hops Extract – is used as a natural treatment for tenseness & restless sleep.

These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA. This product is not intended to treat, diagnose, cure, mitigate or prevent any disease.

Do You Need RestAid® ?
Hard time falling asleep?
Can't sleep through the night?
Concerned about the side effects of sleeping pills?
Consistently wake up tired & foggy?
Feel fatigued in the daytime?

Having Trouble Finding RestAid®?

For years consumers have only had the option of prescription pills or ineffective supplements to be able to get a good night's sleep!

Try Restaid® Risk Free for 30 days. The manufacturer of Restaid® wants you to experience for yourself this new all-natural breakthrough developed to help you fall asleep faster and awake more refreshed.

Call today to get RestAid® Risk Free!

888-867-5531

Mention Code for FREE Upgrade! RA100101

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The Nation

2nd Annual Online Auction

"GO SHOPPING."

That was the Bush era's misguided solution to a deepening recession. Unfortunately, the rest is history.

Instead of buying your loved ones holiday gifts that enrich the corporate establishment, why not share your passion for progressive journalism by bidding on an item in **The Nation** second annual online auction.

We're auctioning some incredible relics from 144 years of publishing, plus some chances to connect with **The Nation** in person and dozens of unique items donated by our readers and friends. You'll feel good knowing that all proceeds from the auction will go toward keeping **The Nation** free of corporate influence.

Celebrate the holidays in a way that doesn't have to contradict your progressive beliefs. Get a jump on your holiday shopping and feel good knowing that every dollar raised from the auction will help **The Nation**.

Here are some of the items we're auctioning off:

- Mensa Assessment
- Political Campaign Buttons
- Original political cartoons
- Vintage photographs
- Lots of autographed books
- 2010 Bermuda Cruise tickets including lunch with Victor
- Lunch with Katrina at the Union Square Cafe
- Sonoma Vineyard Afternoon
- Stay in Cuernevaca vacation house
- Free Blues Show
- Guest visit on political talk show
- Mendocino Coast Inn Weekend

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